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"THEN THEY WERE AMONGST THE GUNS, SLASHING, HACKING, SHOUTING"

WITH FRENCH AT THE FRONT

A Story of the Great European War down to the Battle of the Aisne

BY

CAPTAIN F. S. BRERETON

Author of "On the Field of Waterloo" "A Hero of Sedan" "With Roberts to Candahar" "A Sturdy Young Canadian" &c.

Illustrated by Arch. Webb

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WITH FRENCH AT THE FRONT

CHAPTER I

The Day of Days

A WHIRLING, nerve-racking day was coming to an end, a sultry day which set the mobs perspiring, and on which the pavements and the smooth streets of the German capital reflected the sun's rays till the air scintillated, till the people gasped. And now the evening had come, the evening of a day than which there had been none more exciting—nay, none half so exciting—in all the history of Berlin, not even those eventful days in 1870. Then, mobs had raced along the self-same streets shouting and waving flags. Then, as now, the crowds had rushed to the bureau of news to gather the latest tidings. In 1870 it was war. It was war now. War!—war! War against Russia. War against France. War for which the Fatherland had been waiting, aye, waiting and longing.

But even the most patriotic of people must have rest, for active patriotism demands a deal of energy. That frantic rushing up and down the well-ordered streets of Berlin had taken it out of her citizens—that and the close, suffocating heat. They were hoarse after much cheering. They were thirsty after their visit to the palace and the oft-repeated singing of their national anthem. Arms were weary with lifting hats to the colours of marching regiments, while people's eyes and their brains swam with the changing scenes of this momentous day. Yes, the day of days had come at last. The long waiting, the steady, grinding efforts of a whole nation training for one purpose had now ceased. Years and years of preparation, of self-sacrifice, of overwhelming taxation had come to an end. The work, the intrigues, the might of the people were at length to attain their purpose. For the mailed fist, hitherto clad in doeskin of surpassing softness, was naked and bare. The War Lord had thrown down the gauntlet. It had been flung crashing at the feet of Russia and France, and—and—well, the years of waiting were done with. Germany was now about to snatch her place in the sun. That very morning she was mighty, feared almost universally, loved by none. To-morrow she would be mistress of the world. The map of Europe was about to be changed. The fingers of the mailed fist were already stretched out to snatch in vast possessions.

No wonder, then, that the people of Berlin were

worn out with the excitement of it all, with the immense relief after such a lengthy period of working and waiting. It was "The Day". They had made the most of it; and now, as the lights began to twinkle in the windows and the dull haze of evening fell over the city, they betook themselves to their homes, their cafés, and their favourite haunts, there to rest their weary limbs, to drink and eat perhaps — though it was fluid they mostly fancied—and, ensconced in the easiest chairs, to discuss the business of the day till it was threadbare.

The nearest clock was striking the quarter after eight as Captain James Fletcher stepped from a side entrance of the British Embassy. He consulted a watch secured to his wrist, adjusted his Homburg hat, and took a stout cane from the footman.

"Good night!"

"Good night, sir!" The man, a tall British flunkey, powdered and bewigged, bowed over the officer's cane. He was as cool, as severely self-effacing as any flunkey might be expected to be, and yet there was just the merest flutter of anxiety about his steady eyes. Discreet, silent, and respectful, it had been his duty for years now to usher every sort and size of individual into the Embassy. He had even bowed the Kaiser over the hospitable threshold of this domain of British officialdom within the city of Berlin. Princes had come and gone, Ministers galore had wiped their

boots upon the immaculate mat which was within his province. Officers, too, had gained admission: some in the swagger trappings of German cavalry or of the Imperial Guard; others in the spick-and-span mufti which the pick of London tailors know so well how to turn out.

And always this tall fellow had admitted or seen the last of such visitors with that same stately coolness, with the same inscrutable look upon his frank features, and often enough without so much as a syllable escaping his lips. But now—well—surely this crisis excused him.

"Good night, sir!" he repeated, still bowing; and then: "It's war, sir? With us, sir?" he asked.

Jim Fletcher extracted a cigarette from his case, tapped the end upon the handle of his cane, and puffed as the flunkey applied the flame of a match. He smiled easily as he looked the man squarely in the eyes.

"It's the time for us to push forward the best that's in us," he answered indirectly. "To-morrow servants, masters, ambassadors and their wives and children will have need of all their courage. Yes, it's war."

He went down the steps of this side entrance quietly, and strode off along the pavement with long, swinging steps, the elastic tread one might expect from one of Britain's officers. He left the flunkey gazing after his retreating figure, still bowing, still gripping the remains of the flaring match.

"War!" the man repeated, a gleam in his eyes. "Then it's come at last, and these Germans have got what they've been asking for. Phew! War!"

It took his breath away, held him speechless for close upon a minute, while still he gripped the handle of the door. The match had already burned his fingers and had been cast out with sudden anger. But the pain left the man unmoved. It was this big news which held him dumbfounded.

"War!" he repeated for the twentieth time. "What these Germans don't even guess at now. They're ready, they are. They've been smiling and smiling behind their hands this many a year, and making ready. Now they've taken it up with Russia and France, believing they'll lick 'em both without a great effort. But they ain't reckoned on Britain. They don't know that we've chipped in. Phew! Won't they sing when the news reaches 'em!"

He shut the door very gently, straightened his tall figure, and smoothed out the creases which bowing had set in his waistcoat. Then he turned and went soft-footed across the small hall which gave entrance from this side doorway.

"Hah!" He was round and back at the door a moment later, for the evening lull that had fallen over the city was suddenly broken. A dull, reverberating sound was coming from the distance, echoing along streets almost deserted these last two hours. The mobs which had raced past the embassy that afternoon had gone, gone for good,

everyone hoped. But—surely that was the mob again stirring?

"They've got the news too," the flunkey told himself. "Wonder how they'll like it? I haven't lived this long time among these Germans without knowing that they both fear and hate us. Wonder how they'll take this move? Interfering with the War Lord's ambitions, eh?" he smiled, with very obvious satire. "Chipping in when we ain't wanted. Fools who won't sit quiet till Russia and France are beaten to a standstill, and till Germany's ready to take us on, fleet and all, single-handed. Hah! That mob's on the move again. I knew it."

A crash, the clatter and tinkle of falling glass, and the dull rumble of a heavy body rolling over thickly-carpeted flooring set him running. No one within the embassy had ever seen him do that before, nor even witnessed the merest ruffling of his frigid calmness. An under-footman gaped as the man flew past him two steps at a time. Then, hearing a roar of voices outside, and the crash of more broken windows, the younger man followed.

Meanwhile Captain Fletcher had stopped at the corner of the embassy. He too had heard that ominous sound, the fast-approaching roar of a mob roused to anger. It was coming from the depths of a side street, swelling in volume as it came, getting higher pitched and more ominous. He could hear the patter and click of a thousand pairs of boots, and the hooting and angry bellows of

some of the more excitable members rushing toward him. Then a shout smote his ears, a shout at close quarters, that same crash and tinkle which had startled the flunkey within the embassy, and the dull rolling of the missile cast within the home of King George's representative within the German capital. He turned swiftly, to see one of Berlin's police immediately in front of the building. The man was laughing, laughing grimly.

"As one would imagine," said Jim Fletcher reflectively, his cigarette within his fingers, his tall, natty figure half-supported on his cane. "Quite to be expected," he smiled, puffing smoke from his lips. "In a city where everything is done to order, where the police regulate the movements of the people as if they were sheep, and most things are 'verboten' (forbidden), still, the stoning of the British Embassy is to be encouraged."

A hatless, frantic individual rushed past him, a German gone mad with anger and excitement.

"Down with England!" he screamed, and again the policeman smiled, an indulgent smile. But for his official garb, and for the fact that such public expression of one's feelings was *infra dig.* in one of his exalted position, he himself would have shouted. But he could smile, and, of course, he was powerless to interfere!

"Bah! Down with the English I say myself also," he said. Then, since he must make some show of exercising his authority, he waved the frantic individual back.

"Stop!" he commanded, yet without the usual sting in his tones. "Why down with England?"

The hatless, frantic individual snarled at him. He was groping in his pocket for a missile with which he hoped to smash one of the embassy windows, and, if Providence were only favourable to him, the head of the British Ambassador also. Gone at the moment was his accustomed fear of and respect for the police of Berlin.

"Why!" he growled, gritting his teeth as he realized that his mad rush to the embassy had resulted in the loss of his missile. "Why down with England? Fool! She has declared war against us."

"Himmel!" The official staggered back a pace. "Himmel! The British have declared war against us, against Germany, who has already Russia and France to contend with, though it is true enough that Austria-Hungary is on our side! Himmel! This is news indeed!"

Like every official within the city of Berlin, he knew the politics of the War Lord and of his council to a nicety. There was nothing to learn, indeed, seeing that from boyhood up he had been trained to believe that Germany must, sooner or later, and sooner rather than later, be mistress of the world. Why, he recollected even then those geography lessons, when the scholars had stood about the room and the map, and the professor had been the centre. "To whom does that belong? That—Australia?" had been the question. And

the answer, "Britain." Again, "To whom that, India; and that, Canada; and that, and that, and that?" "Britain!" the class had always answered, sullen disgust in their tones. "Then to whom shall they belong when the days of training and preparation have gone?" Ah, how the boys and the youths growing to manhood had shouted, "To Germany."

"Himmel!" the official repeated, still waving an arm. "England steps in now to prevent us, eh? She stands between us and our objects! Then she shall pay. Of a surety she shall pay with her blood and treasure. She shall come beneath the iron heel of the German, and then——"

The crowd was all about him now, a yelling, menacing crowd which brushed him aside as if he were non-existent. They shouldered others of his comrades to one side, scorning their presence, and with flaming eyes set upon the embassy rushed towards the steps of the main entrance. A hurricane of stones swept the face of the building. Windows within which a minute earlier lights had twinkled were now shattered and darkened. The handsome door was chipped and starred. Even the stonework had suffered damage. But no one appeared, not a soul ventured to upbraid the mob or to call for assistance. Those within might have been dead. The loudest shrieks and threats of the frantic mob brought no response. The British Embassy was as silent as it would be on the morrow when the Ambassador was gone.

"Break in the door! Come, death to the British!"

The mob dashed forward till they were on the steps, where a half-dozen police faced them and thrust them back. Still no one appeared at the shattered windows. Even the British Ambassador failed to come forward and ask for their clemency. Meanwhile their stock of ammunition was gone; and this lack of opposition, or even of the smallest interest, on the part of the inmates of the embassy in the threats and doings of the mob was distinctly disconcerting. Something was wanted as a distraction. Something to keep their anger at fever-heat.

"Down with England!" they bawled. And then: "Seek for spies. There are scores amongst us."

That set them running in every direction. They broke away from the main entrance, with its handsome steps and its inadequate force of police. They scattered to right and to left, and went shouting and perspiring in search of more adventure. But for their heat and anger they might have found one within a stone's-throw. For Jim Fletcher still leaned upon his cane, still puffed reflectively at his cigarette. A more pronounced and essentially British subject, too, it would have been difficult to discover—that is, had he been sweeping along the streets of Berlin with those long, elastic strides of his. For Jim had the head and shoulders of our islanders. A small, fair moustache set off a

handsome face which was resolute and firm, and had none of the floppy stodginess so often found among the beer-drinking subjects of the Kaiser. His English clothes, too, helped to emphasize his nationality, though, fortunately for him, the cut and finish of the London tailor is common enough in Germany's capital. But the haste and heat of the mob saved him. They hustled past him, screaming in their rage. He could hear the shouts and hoarse hoots of their leaders, now far down the street. At length almost all were gone. He and the police alone were left, police who smiled sardonically as they gazed at the windows of the embassy.

"Himmel!" growled the one who had already spoken. "Then it is war with Britain too?"

"It is," a comrade nodded. "War. The *Berliner Tageblatt* has published the statement."

"And this is the first blow," a third grinned wolfishly, pointing to the damage behind him.

"Just a little sample of what is coming. The pigs of Britishers shall learn. Wait till we have thrashed the French and the Russians. Ah! Wait till then, till our fleet and our soldiers make for England. I would not be a Britisher this day for the wealth of the Kaiser."

Jim regarded them nonchalantly, puffed a cloud of smoke in their direction, and turned down the street at the side of the embassy. He didn't hurry. He never even looked over his shoulder. He had nerves of steel, and long familiarity with

Berlin and the Germans made him feel secure even in spite of the Germans.

"They hate us. That's natural," he reflected. "To-morrow they will be cooler. Later on—who knows?"

He came to a sudden stop. There was a commotion down the street at the far end. A woman's voice was raised. Jim listened, buttoned his coat at the waist, and threw his cigarette into the gutter. "Help!" he heard in the plainest of plain feminine English.

Jim raced towards that appealing sound as if a German mob were behind him.

CHAPTER II

Captain James Fletcher

A LAMP twinkled overhead in the growing darkness. Down at the corner of the side street which ran near the embassy there was a little group of people. Jim saw the silhouette of a raised umbrella, an umbrella in the grip of a woman, and watched as it descended sharply. A cry followed.

"Help! Help!"

An Englishwoman down there was in distress, was being attacked by one of her sisters. Jim sprinted towards the sound with the same celerity he would have employed had he been engaged in regimental sports. Then he heard a man's voice. Another umbrella was raised, clearly silhouetted against the overhead electric lamp, and this, too, descended. There was a gurgle of sounds, loud exclamations, and voices raised in anger. Cowering against the wall of the adjacent house was the figure of a young woman, a slim, neat figure as pronouncedly English in its proportions and appearance as was Jim Fletcher's. All this he took in as he raced forward, together with the fact that five individuals surrounded this unlucky person—four men and a shrieking, bridling woman — while a

child hugged the skirts of the girl crouching against the wall. As Jim reached the group that cry for help was raised again, while once more the two umbrellas were lifted.

"Pardon!" said Jim, interposing his cane between the crouching girl and one of the weapons. His right fist struck the coward who wielded the other full in the mouth, and sent the man rolling into the roadway. Then he ranged himself beside the young woman crouching against the wall, and took the hand of the child clinging to her.

"English, of course?" he asked, in German, "Gentlemen,"—there was a fine ring of scorn in his voice—"gentlemen, no doubt you have made some mistake. Kindly leave us."

Steadily, without show of haste or of excitement, he faced the five creatures who had molested the two at his side. The woman was old and frowzy. The man he had sent rolling—her husband most likely—was thick-set and jowly. His fleshy cheeks quivered with emotion. His thick lips twitched as he endeavoured to shout, and then took to spitting out the teeth which Jim had loosened. Of the remaining three, one was old and grizzled, and stood aside as if ashamed to be in at such a sordid business. The second was a tall, weedy fellow, whose pallid face and rounded shoulders told of an office stool and confined surroundings. The tips of his ears were purple now, and his eyes bloodshot with anger. Even then he was tugging at a hip-pocket, and, recognizing the meaning of such a movement,

Jim floored him in a scientific and most up-to-date manner.

"Sorry," he told the man, again in the best of German, "but, of course, if you will hunt for a revolver you can't blame me."

The third of these gallant fellows appeared to be the son of the woman first mentioned and of her jowly husband.

"English!" he screamed, as if it were not already apparent that Jim Fletcher was of that nationality. "Down with the English!"

There was no harm in his shouting that, and not much to be feared from him. Jim had measured his value in a twinkling, and could afford to ignore him. But his shouts might bring others, and very soon a mob might collect about them. He had seen enough of mobs in Berlin that day, sufficient to warn him of the precariousness of their temper. He was in a nasty hole in any case, and the lanky, weedy clerk was armed with a revolver. Jim looked them all over coolly. The woman had gone a brilliant red. She was on the very point of an explosion, and from venting her rage on the helpless girl by the side of the young English soldier was now shrilly demanding of her husband if he were a man.

"You stand there scowling at him, him, a hated Englishman!" she foamed. "You let him knock you down as if you were nothing, and then stand glaring and counting the teeth he has loosened. Ah, if only I was a man I'd shame you!"

No. There was little to fear from the menfolk of

this particular family. Already, too, the grizzled individual was slinking away. But the weedy clerk's eyes were flashing vengefully as he collected his somewhat shaken frame and stepped off the roadway. Then he furtively felt for his weapon. It was at that precise moment that the man with the jowly cheeks, stung to desperation by the shrill scolding of his wife, doubled his head on to his chest, gripped his umbrella with both hands, and ran in at Jim.

"Don't be frightened," the latter found time to call to the two at his side, while he took a quick step forward. "Do you live near?"

There was no time for more. As it was he had thrown the question over his shoulder. But even as he leaped to one side and drove one fist hard at the fat German he heard a sudden exclamation of terror from behind him.

"Quick! The one with the revolver. He's going to shoot you."

That leap to one side saved Jim Fletcher. He heard the bullet thud against the wall of the house and felt the lead splash him. But though he had not been struck, the bullet had come sufficiently near to be disagreeable. Another followed it in a twinkling.

"Browning automatic," he told himself, for even in moments of excitement Jim liked to be exact. "Still plenty of shots with which to wing me. No, I don't think, my good fellow!"

If the ruffian could shoot quickly Jim was a

wonderful fellow at dodging. The second shot missed him by a yard; the third struck the rim of his Homburg. That, however, saw the end of the shooting, for once more the weedy individual with the stooping shoulders and the pallid countenance went crashing into the street. Over the road a window was tossed open of a sudden, and a woman shrieked. Down the street there was the sound of men hurrying. Jim stood erect for a moment and cast his eyes all about him. Then he stepped into the road and possessed himself of the weapon so recently used against him.

"Perhaps be useful," he thought. "Now, what on earth is a fellow to do in such an emergency? Wait for the police and trust to them to intervene? Not likely after what I've just seen at the embassy! Then— Pardon," he said, turning to the young woman, "er—you didn't answer my question. You live near?"

"A long mile away," she told him. "We were returning home from a drawing lesson. I—we—oh, there are more of these brutes coming."

Jim even had time to decide that he liked the voice. It was refined and gentle. Yet the briskness of the tones, the unfaltering way in which she answered showed spirit, pluck, just what a Britisher likes in one of his own nation.

"Scared, of course," he thought. "That's natural. But got her wits about her. Warned me about that lanky brute with the Browning. Dash it all! This is a mess! Now, how——"

He moved his eyes round again inquisitively. He was still cool and collected, but there was anxiety on his face, a hunted, puzzled expression. More shouts were coming from the end of the street, while the woman opposite had now been joined by a man who made the night hideous with his bellows for assistance. That and the shrill scoldings of the enraged woman near at hand rendered the situation sufficiently bewildering. Jim noticed a door immediately behind him. It belonged to someone or other, and had a neat little hole bored through it by one of the bullets meant for his body. It—no, it wasn't locked.

"Come in," he called.

"But——"

He put a summary end to hesitation. Swinging the frightened child under one arm, he took the girl by one hand and dragged her to the now open door.

"Come inside," he commanded. "Now, take the child. That's locked the door safely. Wonder whom this place belongs to? Well, that doesn't matter, does it? The real question is, Where are the owners? At home?"

"Out, I think," she ventured, and once more Jim told himself he liked the voice. It was frank, tuneful, full of courage. He detected an electric switch in the gloom, and set a flood of light over their surroundings. They were in a wide passage. A stairway ran up from the middle distance, while a hat-rack stood behind him. Hardly more than a yard from him was the girl whom he had rescued

so far from such unpleasant, if not dangerous, surroundings. She was whispering in the child's ear, coaxing the mite and hugging her closely.

"Strange," said Jim aloud. "I could have sworn——"

A loud bang at the door interrupted him. He noticed that, though she started at the sound, his companion looked wonderfully calm and collected. A few minutes before, no doubt, she had shivered with apprehension. But then, hadn't there been abundant reason? What girl, be she ever so courageous, would not be overcome by such an alarming and brutal experience?

"Could have sworn, yes?" she prompted him.

"That we'd met somewhere before this. I——"

Another crushing blow shook the door and set the whole house reverberating. Had the rightful owners been at home, doubtless they would have rushed out into the hall to complicate the situation. Fortunately for the trio standing there, they were at that very moment engaged at a local entertainment, where the entertainers and their audience had by common consent given up all thoughts of frivolity, and were detailing to one another the wickedness and malevolence of Britain, calling down upon her devoted head the vengeance of heaven, and denouncing her and her peoples in no uncertain voice. It was fortunate for Jim that they were absent. But it hardly did more than slightly ease the extremity of the situation. In a little while the door would be driven in, and

then the struggle would have to be gone through again. He clutched the Browning nestling in his pocket. The very quietness of the girl's voice startled him.

"Yes?" she asked again. "You think we may have met before."

Was she laughing? Her voice sounded remarkably as if she were, while there was a quizzical expression on her face.

"By Jove! Pretty! Deuced pretty!" thought Jim. "And—hang it! what an idiot I am! Why, it's——"

"How dense you are!" she laughed; yes, laughed, in spite of the rain of blows which some noble if angry patriot showered upon the door. "I recognized you almost at once. That is, when that brute presented his pistol. Of course, I'm Gladys Fairleigh, you know."

It was stupid of him; and to speak the absolute truth, he was far more dismayed at the news she gave him, and at the bantering tone which he detected, than he had been all through this unexpected adventure. To be sure, she was Gladys Fairleigh. He had met her at some "do" at Portsmouth, met her and liked her.

"How do you do?" he asked, lamely, stupidly.

"Well enough," she told him, demurely. "Only I'm naturally rather anxious. What will they do?"

"Beat in the door," he told her. "We must move. We must get away from the house. To

hide upstairs would be useless, and I'm afraid we can't count on the police to protect us. Berlin has gone crazy. You know the reason?"

"No. What? This wretched war? Why should that make them angry with Britain and the British?"

"Only because we've put a spoke in their wheel. Upset their little game. Come between the Kaiser and his ambitions."

"We? England?"

"None other. The news has just leaked out. The *Berliner Tageblatt* somehow got hold of the news, though war isn't actually declared, and won't be till midnight. Still, it's just as good as declared. Anyway, Berlin, and I suppose every German in the country, has gone stark staring mad. They're out of temper with poor old England."

He laughed grimly. Looking up at him, for he stood a head above her, Gladys realized that she had a man to protect her, a handsome man withal, one who already had shown considerable determination and quickness.

"Aren't you frightened for poor old England?" she asked, wondering. "War is terrible. I thought the Germans were hoping to fight us?"

He laughed again, and at the sound she flushed. The very recklessness of his laugh reassured. It did her good to hear him.

"Frightened for the old country? No!" she heard him say very deliberately, his words punctuated by blows upon the door and by howls from

the mob rapidly collecting. "Of course Germany wants to fight us, Miss Fairleigh. She's been working for it for years, ever since Kaiser Wilhelm discovered that there was a place somewhere in the sun for Prussia. But it was to be war with Britain at Germany's own time; when she was ready. Not at Britain's bidding, not when her work with other nations was only just commencing. But we can't talk the thing over here. Those brutes are howling outside as if they were tigers. We must get out of this. Wait while I have a look round."

"Listen! That is a policeman."

Through the door came loud and peremptory commands, the orders of one accustomed to be obeyed.

"Open at once, or I will fire!" they heard, while the door itself shook as some bulky individual threw himself against it. Jim tiptoed down the passage, switched on another light, and then beckoned. Stepping back to the girl's side quickly, he lifted the child in his arms.

"There's a door at the back," he whispered. "Come."

She followed without a question, switching the light off as she came.

"Well done!" he called to her, secretly glad at such show of courage.

"Now where?" she asked, when they reached the far door and he had dragged it open, having first extinguished the light.

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"'THESE TWO MEN ARE ENGLISH SPIES. ARREST THEM!' SAID THE OFFICIAL"

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"Where? Why, to the house where you are living; over a mile away."

"But—" She hesitated for a moment, causing him to look sharply at her. It was too dark there to discern her features, but he was sure that she was troubled.

"They hate the British," she told him with an impatient stamp. "Ever since I went to them to teach Freda they have trampled on my feelings till my patience has been tried. They will turn me adrift."

"Adrift! At such a time!" He stood in the doorway and spoke sharply. There was a stern note in his voice. "Turn you adrift at such a time, when the mob in Berlin is capable of any violence! We have a sample of it here. I have only just come from witnessing an attack upon the British Embassy. The people are crazy with anger. The thing's impossible."

"Nevertheless it is true enough," she told him steadily, bravely, facing the fact with a courage he could not help but admire. Jim pondered for a moment. It wasn't his habit to hesitate as a rule, and had he been by nature apt to shrink from difficulties, the training he had had, the service upon which he had been engaged these last few years, would certainly have cured him of the habit. A fine linguist, thanks to the fact that Admiral Fletcher had himself been attached to the embassy in Berlin, and later at Paris, and Jim had therefore had wonderful opportunities, he had very soon

been selected by the Intelligence Department. His duties had led him into many difficult and delicate situations. He wasn't a coward. Far from it. Why, even at that moment Gladys was flushing again at the recollection of his cool bravery. But "Turn her adrift. In Berlin!" he exclaimed. "And I—I am the only one she can turn to."

Unconsciously he had spoken aloud.

"I can fend for myself," she said abruptly, even coldly.

"Never!" he told her with energy. Escorting young women amidst a mob of enemies wasn't much in his line. Indeed, escorting them at any time wasn't what he exactly wanted. But here was a friend in distress. He could easily believe that those who employed her might turn her adrift. From what he knew and had seen of many of the Germans he could believe them capable of such an act. Straightway he banished any feelings of hesitation he may have had.

"What address?" he asked her, while the door at the end of the passage shook ominously.

She told him swiftly. "Quick! They will break in in a moment."

"Then come," he said, and led her down the steps into the yard at the back. In silence they crossed it, and halted for a moment while he peeped through the gateway. The street was empty, and at once he led her out. A minute later a taxi bowled past them, and Jim whistled.

"Get in, please," he commanded. "Now, we

will hand Freda over to her people and get your luggage."

"And then?" she asked.

"England," he told her. "That is, if we can. It will take time and cunning. The lines are blocked with troop trains, and foreigners are forbidden to travel. But if we stay on here we are prisoners till the end of the war. Are you game, Miss Fairleigh?"

"Try me," she laughed. "I'd risk anything to escape from these Germans."

Thus it fell out that the two set their faces for home, careless of the risks they must run before arriving at their destination.

CHAPTER III

Across a Hostile Country

THEY say that out of trivial matters there arise often enough events of unparalleled importance; and certainly the hubbub into which Europe had been plunged, and which gripped Jim Fletcher and his pretty companion in its unwelcome embrace, had, at first sight, arisen out of almost nothing. For what is the assassination of even an heir-apparent to the Austro-Hungarian throne compared with this throbbing, relentless rush to arms, this mad desire to buckle on war harness and with sharpened sword to slay and slay and slay? A mere nothing! A mere result of the fevered conspiring of some ill-conditioned Servian, of a plot hatched in some noisome den and at length brought to fruition. And yet, see the result! War! Men rushing to arms; broad countries stripped of their workers; women and children left on every side deserted and unprotected.

As they crept across the country at a snail's pace, their train being thrust into siding after siding to allow of troop trains passing, Jim told his companion all he knew about the matter.

"You see," she said naïvely, "I'm so densely

ignorant of international affairs. What can this dreadful murder have to do with the Kaiser?"

"Everything has to do with the Kaiser," he laughed. "That is, everything in Germany: and if her arms are victorious, everything outside also. The whole affair is, in slang parlance, a put-up job. The Kaiser wanted war, has worked for war, meant to set his power over Europe by the means of war. He and his military leaders, aye, and the professors and teachers of the people, have drummed it into the head of the nation that Germany is destined to be the greatest power on earth, to control the world, to be rich, rulers of the sea, masters of India and of all our colonies. But she had to have some pretext for waging war."

"And this assassination was a pretext?"

"Yes and no. Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Germany form the Triple Alliance, each country sworn to support the other in case of attack. Now follow the movements of the past few weeks. This heir-apparent—no doubt a most estimable and valuable personage, heir-apparent to the Austro-Hungarian throne, you understand—is slain by a Servian. Servia lies next door to Austria-Hungary, and happens to be getting strong and independent. She has a well-trained army, and her troops did well of late in the Balkan War. In fact, she is likely to become a thorn in Austria-Hungary's side. She must be crushed now, before she is too strong. The Emperor Joseph declares war against Servia so as to punish this dastardly assassination. That

is his excuse. But Germany is behind the movement. For Servians are all Slavs, and Russia is their natural protector. Now Russia enters the field. 'Stop this war against the Servians,' the Tsar commands, 'else I mobilize my forces.' 'Mobilize your armies and you threaten me,' Germany now chimes in, sending an arrogant note to the Russians. Then she also commences to mobilize, or rather, completes a secret mobilization of which the British Embassy were well aware. In fact, this secret mobilization is one of the crucial questions in the whole movement. It is one of Germany's strongest moves, part of a deep-laid and carefully-planned scheme."

"In case of war?" she asked him.

"In preparation for the war for which she has been working. Russia knows that Germany is already mobilized almost completely. She realizes that war is imminent. She cannot afford to be taken unprepared, and therefore proceeds with her preparations. That is enough for Germany. The Kaiser declares war against the Tsar, and, seeing that Russia and France have an agreement to support one another, against France also. So far, so good. Germany is ready. She marches straight for France, reckoning to take her unready, to smash her hastily-collected armies, and capture Paris. To save time she marches her own battalions to the Belgian frontier, for a straight line across that country is the shortest route to the French capital. Then Britain comes in."

"How?" she asked him, a little uncertain of his meaning.

"In this way. Belgium is a tiny country, placed next to this big and powerful Germany. If she were conquered and Germany occupied her territory, we should have German warships within two hours' steam of England. Long ago the case of Belgium was fought out. The Powers—Britain, Germany, France, to mention the most important of them—swore to respect Belgian neutrality. See how Germany keeps her word. At the first excuse she tears up that pledge of hers, and asks Britain to stand by, promising to restore the country to the Belgians when she has done with it. Thank God, Old England has full sense of her responsibilities, and keeps her honour untarnished," he declared with heat. "She refused, and promised war if Germany did not at once retire from Belgium. Germany as promptly declined, and—and, there we are."

There they were, with troop trains crawling past them, filled to overflowing with soldiers shouting and singing themselves hoarse, as if going forward to death and wounds were entirely enjoyable.

"Poor beggars! They'll not find it a walk-over," Jim told her. "But let me warn you again, Miss Fairleigh. Speak no English. For the moment we are Dutch. Don't I look like a meinheer?"

He laughed at her, and to tell the truth she had good reason for smiling back. For strenuous times call for strenuous and active measures. Jim Fletcher

had not been wrong when he opined that the getting out of Berlin and of Germany would be no easy matter. Thousands of people were hunting for English folk. Plenty of harmless Britishers had already had cause to rue their meeting with these angry and aggressive individuals. Why, their own reception by Freda's parents had been anything but pleasant.

"Who are you?" her father demanded of Jim, when he escorted the two back to the address Gladys had given him. "An Englishman! Bah!"

"Hardly polite," thought Jim, keeping his temper unruffled. Indeed, he was rather amused than otherwise. "Yes, English," he said sweetly.

"Then you and the beggarly girl can get out of this and back to your own country. Hi! frau, you owe this girl anything? Then pay at once, and as little as you need. In half an hour, if they are not gone, I will call in the police."

"Then in half an hour I will call again," Jim told him. "Pack only what you absolutely need," he whispered to Gladys, "and carry a small bag. Wear your oldest clothes and do everything to appear other than smart. When you are ready, come down to a cab I shall have. Don't be surprised if you find me disguised slightly."

He went off with a courteous bow to the frau and a genial nod to the fuming German. Once outside, he took a short cut by a back street to his lodgings, lodgings which he had frequently lived in before. The woman who kept them was English, English

to the backbone, but resident for years past in Berlin for some family reason.

"I'll be back after the war, Mrs. Rawlins," he told her, smiling at her look of consternation.

"Lor' a mussy!" she gasped. "After the war! That'll be never! We'll all be killed, sir. England'll be wiped out."

"Not a bit of it," he reassured her. "But I've got to hurry, Mrs. Rawlins. Look after my clothes, as you've done before, and pay yourself out of this note. Now, good-bye!"

He had dashed up to his room, and now stood on the doormat ready to depart. But it was not the sprightly, energetic Jim we have met before. It was a young man decidedly prone to stoutness, whose dark moustache drooped over a mouth which looked weak if anything. His clothes were certainly not the production of a London tailor, while his hat and boots looked as if they had come from some slop-shop. That was the appearance of the individual whom Gladys Fairleigh found when she descended to the taxi-cab.

"But—I—Who are you?" she asked swiftly, and would have retreated.

"Get in, quick, Miss Fairleigh," she heard, and the voice was that of Jim Fletcher. "There's a policeman over the road who's already not a little interested. Go on, cabby!" he called out.

The engine was already running, and now buzzed loudly. They shot away from the pavement just as the policeman began to cross towards them.

He hesitated, wondered whether he would signal for the cab to stop, and then it was too late.

"Thank goodness!" sighed Jim. "I hate the Berlin police at any time, and now more than ever. From what I saw to-day they are capable of standing by and seeing violence done to the British. Well, here we are. Those clothes will do very well. We're bound for Holland."

"Holland?"

"Yes. She's the only nation near at hand and between this and England that Germany cares to keep friendly with. She needs the Dutch. She wants the food which Holland grows, and which will be of vital importance to Germany once the British fleets get busy. My word! Who's that? Hi! Stop!"

He leaned far out of the window and beckoned to a young man striding along the pavement.

"Another Englishman," Gladys told herself, feeling a glow of pride that Englishmen should be so distinctive. Indeed, no one could have mistaken the one to whom Jim called as anything else but essentially British. He was a tall, active young man, somewhere about Jim's age, with clean-shaven face and a decidedly nautical appearance.

"Dicky Dance," Jim told her. "Wonder is, the crowd haven't chased him or the police apprehended him as a spy. Hello there, Dick!"

"Hello yourself! What! Jim Fletcher, of all people, and— Pardon! Sorry, awfully!"

He had only at that moment caught sight of Gladys. The view he got sent the blood surging to his cheeks.

"Miss Gladys Fairleigh," said Jim. "A hunted English lady. I found a noble band of German men attacking her with umbrellas. I hope to escort her home to England. Dick, you'll come too. She can't have too many protectors. Where were you off to?"

"Where? Nowhere. Anywhere. Didn't know. Tried to get back to my lodgings, but was driven off by a howling mob. Tried to make for the club, and had to flog a tall German on the way. A policeman then chased me. I was wondering whether the embassy wouldn't be my next port of call. Where the deuce is a fellow to cast anchor?"

He was darker than Jim, though perhaps as handsome, and certainly a fine figure of a man. He was nettled, too, and there was a savage ring when he told of his movements. Not that he had forgotten Gladys's presence. He had lifted his hat to her with an elegance which betrayed his breeding. Then the subject of the Germans had brought a light into his eyes and a rasp into his voice.

"Wait till we get aboard the fleet, my boy," he told Jim hoarsely; "we'll do our best to show 'em. Where am I going now? Don't know. Only I'm making for home."

"Get in!" Jim commanded,

"And then?"

"Home. England."

"But how?" the sailor demanded.

"First to my rooms, where we'll make you into a Dutchman. Then—well, then just as fortune directs us."

And a queer journey she had led them. The two men had escorted the girl during four long, interminably long days. For one whole day they had been hung up in a siding within twenty miles of Berlin itself. A dozen times they had been pitchforked into another train, or on to some crowded platform and told to wait. Then innumerable officials had closely scrutinized the fugitives.

"Dutch? For Holland? Passports, please."

How often had they heard that question!—and always Jim had the papers ready.

"Can't make out how you got them," Dicky Dance grinned at him after one of these inspections and interrogations.

"Then don't ask, Dicky, my boy," Jim smiled back. "It's sufficient that I got them, and that we're three humble and frightened Dutch people making for home. Of course, it's a pity that you don't speak Dutch. That's due to your own laziness. Nearer the frontier it'll have to be because you're naturally dumb. As for Miss Fairleigh, well, we'll hope these wretches will interrogate us alone. If not——"

"Well, if not?" Lieutenant Dick Dance asked curtly. Then the two smiled.

"I'm due back in England," Jim told him, with an easy laugh. "I've my orders."

"George! So have I; orders to join the fleet this very minute."

"Shut up!" exclaimed Jim, of a sudden. They were pulling slowly at a station within a few miles of the Dutch frontier, and noticed the usual mass of blue-grey troops encamped on either side of them. They stopped, and some officials boarded the train.

"Where for? Passports?"

Jim handed them over nonchalantly. The official towered over him in threatening manner and ordered him to rise. Another presented himself at the door of the compartment. "Read that," he jerked out, handing a telegram to his comrade.

"Phit! 'Look for Englishman aboard train for Dutch frontier. Dark moustache. Accompanied by a lady. Probably armed with a Browning revolver. If so, number of weapon 4296. Chief of Berlin Police.'"

"Stand up," the official commanded roughly, drawing his revolver. "Yes; tall, dark, that is now, though I fancy the moustache is coloured. And—himmel! armed with a Browning quick-firer, and the number stamped upon it is 4296. You are all three arrested. Comrade, call a guard. Here are the three English spies for whom the Berlin chief is seeking."

Jim was dumbfounded. How had the police obtained this information? For it was true enough

that he was armed with a Browning pistol, the very one which he had obtained from that seedy, round-shouldered individual who had so cravenly attacked Gladys. Ah! The rascal must have told his story to the police, and somehow or other they had pieced it and other information together.

"Hang it!" growled Dick. "Looks nasty."

There was the deep tread of heavy boots in the corridor. A corporal halted his men with a loud command and with military precision.

"These two men are English spies. Arrest them!" said the official. "I have full evidence of the fact that one was armed. Doubtless there will be further evidence from Berlin."

"You will wait for that?" his comrade asked him, with a lift of his bushy eyebrows. "Why wait for further information when it is already clear that they are English and therefore spies? Let us take them to the major and shoot them."

"No!" The official had given his decision and would not have it upset by a corporal. "Carry out your duty," he said. "Take the three away. They can be shot to-morrow as well as this evening."

Gladys looked at her two protectors, and could not help but admire them.

"Frightfully sorry," said Jim apologetically. "I had hoped——"

"You wait," growled Dicky Dance. "I ain't shot by a heap, nor are you, Miss Gladys. We'll show 'em——"

"March!" Guards were on either side of them now, and they were hustled out of the carriage on to the platform. All three were then surrounded by the escort and hurried out of the station. A little later they were driven into the local prison, where Jim and Dick were handcuffed and pushed into a cell. Their unfortunate companion was dragged away in another direction.

"So it ends here," said Jim philosophically, as the door of the cell was banged to. "Heigho! I'm sleepy."

"Ends! Not much! You think I'm done for?" demanded Dicky hotly. "I'm under orders to rejoin the fleet, Jim."

"And I have important information for the intelligence Department. After that I join the Flying Corps. Didn't know I'd given up intelligence for flying, eh, Dicky?"

"I didn't. How long since? But you say you'll join?"

"Yes; and mean it. Like you, I'm under orders," Jim told him with a pleasant smile. "You don't think I'm going to let fellows like these keep me from duty!"

CHAPTER IV

Three Enemies of Prussia

It was a pretty kettle of fish, as Dicky said, and said with emphasis on many occasions. A most unfortunate ending to their attempt at escape from the Fatherland, the land then bubbling and seething with preparations for war.

Seated in a corner of the dark cell, he ground his teeth with rage and impotence.

"Caged! Taken as spies, of course!" he growled.

"Of course," agreed Jim laconically. "In German eyes every foreigner at such a time is a spy. To speak the truth, the idea is uppermost in their crafty minds for one sole reason."

"And that?" asked Dicky, though the subject rather bored him. "Hang it, man!" he grumbled. "What does it matter now? Spies are one and the same in Germany, whether guilty or innocent. They're enemies and are shot."

Jim agreed with him again, smoothly, soothingly. "I was going to observe that they have flooded poor old England and the Continent of Europe with spies till the idea is always buzzing

in their heads. Why, I can say this with every knowledge that I am speaking the truth: half the German men one meets in Britain are spies, paid or otherwise. The majority of the women are likewise. Business men, German Consuls, professional men, men of means who have settled down and live the life of country gentlemen in Britain are spies, working, working all the while for the day, Dicky, the day which has come at last."

It wasn't the time to be discussing such a matter, but Jim was not far wide of the truth. Before the advent of war, before that memorable evening of August 4th, 1914, Germans had always been welcomed in Britain. It was known that the Fatherland had spies in our big seaport towns, spies near the dockyards, and others in important centres. But no one had suspected what those first few days had brought to light—a wholesale condition of espionage, a condition which none could describe as other than a flagrant and disgusting abuse of the free hospitality Britain and the British race had shown the Germans who had come to their shores. Spies and news-gatherers were in every corner. The declaration of war brought scheming scoundrels from their lairs with a hundred plans for wrecking bridges and works, and crippling the Government and the military and naval authorities. They were watching our preparations on every hand and passing them on to Berlin, passing them by means of secret wire-

less installations, by carrier pigeons, by every conceivable device.

Nor was Britain alone infested. German spies were in Holland, in France, Belgium, Russia, and every European country. They swarmed in America. They were watching their opportunity in India, where was now, as they imagined, presented to them a fine chance to stir up the native population, to foment that undercurrent of discontent which the world knew—Germany better than any one else—existed.

Jim had not overstated his case either, when telling Gladys of the cause of war. Britain could have stood aside. He and Dicky and the girl they escorted and whom Jim had so nobly defended could even then have been in Berlin, secure and safe from molestation. But only could they have done that because of Britain's dishonour. Only could Great Britain have stood aside and watched this commencing conflict between Russia and France on the one hand and Germany and Austria-Hungary united on the other at the expense of what she treasures, and will ever treasure, far above wealth, power, position, all that goes to make life worth the living. Dishonoured, contemptible in the eyes of the whole world of nations —nations perhaps jealous of her, though not hating her as did Germany—in the eyes of those numerous states who, up to this critical moment, had ever looked up to and taken example from Great Britain, she could have stood aside, have

hugged her tight little island and her numerous colonies and dependencies within her fleet, and sat down securely to watch this titanic conflict which Germany had commenced. Yes, which the Fatherland, the Kaiser, and his military despots had brought about. Britain had merely to ignore that scrap of paper which the German Ministers spoke so lightly of when unctuously persuading our Ambassador that it was of no moment.

"What is Belgium? What is this treaty which we Germans and you of Great Britain have set our hands to?" the highest Minister in the land of Prussia had said. "Nothing. Belgium shall be unharmed. We shall hand her country back to her when we have marched our troops across to France. As to the treaty—poof! It is merely a scrap of paper."

But it bore Great Britain's signature. It carried the honour of millions of us, millions of simple, plain-dealing Britishers, with scrupulous minds and an idea of fairness and of what is proper far transcending ideas in the minds of Prussians. We had nothing to gain. We had all to lose—lives, ships, treasure—above all, that position in the world as protector of the weak which our sea power and our known peace-loving policy has gained for us.

Let those who imagine that, on that eventful August day, Great Britain was actuated by regard for her own future banish that notion at once. She did not take the vital step of declaring war because

she feared the possibility that, France having been exhausted and Russia defeated, she in turn would be annihilated by the German host. No such fear prompted her. It was her honour that was at stake. But by the time Jim and his friend were raging impatiently in their cell, the question at issue had become that of Britain's security. Her whole future, her freedom, and the freedom of those who had trusted in her were involved.

That is how the crisis took Britain. She was even then on the verge of civil war in Ulster. Ireland was an armed camp. The situation was essentially critical there. But wait! At the first call to arms, at sight of this European crisis, the British straightened themselves. Men already itching for the fray in Ireland dropped their differences at a word. We were one nation, with one thought only, the defence of our honour and our rights, the defence of our homes, our wives and our children, of the tight little island and the colonies and commerce which have made us what we are.

From every quarter of the compass came the same clarion note—Englishmen, men of Great Britain, stand firm, stand shoulder to shoulder! In Canada, in Australia and New Zealand, in every colony there was the same courageous resolve. Armageddon was upon us. That devastating war which had been promised, which wise people had foreseen, was upon us at last. For us, too, the great day had come, the day when we must be tried in the fire, when we must fight for our very existence.

And here were Jim and Dicky kept out of it all, likely enough to be shot on the morrow. Nor were they solitary examples, seeing that foreigners throughout the Fatherland were under surveillance, and experiencing often enough the most brutal treatment. Even neutral peoples were not immune. It was enough that they were not German.

"And so here we are," Dick observed again, sitting in his corner, the furrows in his fine forehead emphasized by the shadows cast by a solitary gas-lamp common to that and the neighbouring cell. "Boxed in. Cornered."

He looked over at Jim. That gallant officer was meditatively smoking a cigarette.

"Yes," he agreed; "boxed in. Rotten!"

"Exactly. Rotten!"

Conversation flagged. There was nothing to talk about save what was doleful. And so they sat, thinking, thinking, almost desperate, counting the hours as they passed, hungry and thirsty, yet with their wants ignored in the greater distress of their desperate position.

The latch of their cell clicked. Then there was silence. Jim looked up swiftly and placed a finger to his lips, the chains of his handcuffs clanking as he did so.

"Someone spying upon us," he whispered. "Spying's a fine art here. The folks in this country are crazy about it."

Click went the latch again. A light step was heard outside and then again silence. Jim smoked

composedly. He had nerves of steel, as he had proved already. Dicky was no coward either. In the gun-room of his ship he was known as a most excellent fellow, a jolly comrade, light-hearted, jovial always. On deck, at the breech of the battery he commanded, the men could have told you something about Dicky Dance.

"'Ot stuff, and don't you make no error. 'E ain't afraid of nothin'. 'E's been in a submarine this past five years, and what 'e's dared 'as made 'im just a chip o' granite. Dicky ain't the one to wink an eyelid even if there is shells humming round."

That was the opinion of the tars, one and all; and if their officer but moved a finger, made a gesture, or gave the merest syllable of an order, it was at once, and smartly too, "Aye, aye, sir! Aye, aye!"

Dicky too watched the door reflectively. His legs were curled beneath him. His was in the ordinary sense an easy pose. But the hands were clenched; every muscle was at tension. It was life and death for him and his comrade, that he knew. Well, that being so, he was ready to make a fight for the life which these Germans would so quickly take from him on the morrow.

"Still there," he whispered. "Latch raised and all ready to burst in. Jim, supposing——"

"Ready," came the swift answer, while the soldier raised himself on one knee. "Rush together. Get the chain of your handcuffs round his neck. I'll smother his shouts. He's——"

Click went the latch again, and the door moved

ever so little. It was abundantly clear that someone was listening; and though they waited, their nerves strung tight as steel bands, waited for fully five minutes, still no one appeared, the door did not open, and no one was to be heard, though the latch clicked occasionally.

"Oh, come in or get along," cried Jim angrily, his splendid self-command gone for the moment. This waiting tried him more than he could say. And, let us explain, neither he nor Dick was altogether wrapped up in their own position, distressed at what was before them. They were English gentlemen and officers first and last, and were conscious of an uncompleted duty. Fortune had cast them together in a hostile land, and had made Jim first of all the willing rescuer of Gladys Fairleigh. There, had it been possible, his services would have ended, for Jim had other duties to perform, duties with the British army. But fate and the fiendish, fighting lust for war which had seized upon Germany had been too strong for him. It had brought all that was best in some men to the front. It had thrown into the clear light of day all that was savage, all that was unmanly in others. It had shown the girl's employers in their true light. They had cast her out. Of all in Prussia none hated the English more than they, though the desirability of the language and of English culture was not lost to them. Even if they hated us they would give their young daughter every advantage, and for that reason had engaged Gladys to teach her. Petty,

boorish, and unmannerly, they had taken advantage of her isolation, of her poverty and dependence for the moment upon them, to launch a thousand trifling insults at her. Knowing themselves safe from retaliation, they had not hesitated to indulge in tirades against England, and, in short, had made it abundantly clear that they hated and detested all that was British. Finally, on the outbreak of war, on the evening of that eventful August 4th, when it became apparent that England would not be trifled with, they had cast her out, cast an unprotected, helpless girl out into the seething streets of Berlin. Thus a new duty had fallen upon Jim, and his accidental meeting with Dicky Dance, an old chum, had led to their halving the responsibility.

"Ah! Roused, whoever it is," growled Dick as the door began to open. "Only wish they'd bring some food and water. Even if a chap is to be slaughtered he has a right to expect something to eat and drink. Jingo!"

There was something strange about the individual whose figure showed in the half-open doorway. Neither Jim nor Dick could distinguish the features, for they were shadowed by the official cap and peak, and the door itself cast a deep shadow. But the figure and its movement, or rather its want of movement, were altogether different from what one could and would have expected from a German janitor. Jim and his chum had long since become used to German officialism, to the peremptory com-

mands of the police and the thousand-and-one other persons who had authority in Prussia. In a country where a uniform, however poor in gold braid and glittering buttons, was still a uniform, a symbol of officialism, even if worn by only a postman, where servants of the Government were one and all superior to mere civilians, and where the rights and privileges of such civilians could be overridden by any Jack in office, it is not to be wondered at that janitors amongst others had a peremptory and overbearing manner about them. Jim would have expected this individual to burst into the cell, to command them to rise, and to abuse them in no uncertain tones for their slowness. Instead, the janitor peered at them through the half-open door, as if hesitating, as if uncertain how to act. It angered Dick excessively.

"Well!" he growled in his best German, which was indifferent on the most auspicious occasions. "Do come in and join the party."

Jim laughed a careless laugh. "Or stay out and cut off the draught," he said. Then he leaned back against the wall, amazed at what followed. For the door opened wider and the figure darted in. It swung the door to at once, and stood staring at the two prisoners. Then a gentle ripple of laughter greeted them.

It was Gladys Fairleigh, the cap now removed from her head, her features plain and unmistakable under the gas-light.

CHAPTER V

Off to England

"How did you manage it? Where have you come from? I—we're dumbfounded. You've got the whole kit of our late janitor. Coat, cap, sword, even revolver. It's amazing!"

"Jingo! Takes our breath away," Dick chimed in, now standing to his full height and staring at Gladys as if she were an apparition. Almost, too, she might be described as that, for her sudden and unexpected coming, the possibilities it gave rise to, set the hearts of the two officers thudding and bouncing. It caused their hopes to rise to a giddy pinnacle.

"Sit down, Miss Fairleigh," said Jim a second or two later, seeing that the situation was too much for her. Indeed, Gladys had been wonderfully plucky up to the moment when all depended on her alone. Now that she was with the two gallant men who had protected her from Berlin, when, as it seemed, there was no longer need for personal exertion or for nerves to be braced, she sat down suddenly upon the floor and buried her face in her hands. They saw her shudder and heard a stifled

sob. It was characteristic of Jim and Dicky that they stared at one another with misgiving, in that helpless sort of way adopted by men on such occasions. They could deal with a dangerous situation; but tears, a woman's tears, robbed them of all action, took the heart out of them, made them almost helpless. Jim coughed. Dicky set his hat straight and muttered.

"Please, Miss Fairleigh," Jim ventured, and saw another shudder shake her from head to foot. But the voice had its effect. She looked up. She mopped her tears away with a handkerchief. With lightning swiftness she was almost herself again. Of a sudden she became fiercely energetic.

"Listen," she said, getting to her feet and gripping each by the arm. "I was put in a sort of guard-room. Those brutes gave me food and drink, and then would have chatted with me. Later they went to the adjoining room, and I heard voices, smelt tobacco smoke, and heard the clink of glasses."

"Ah!" remarked Dicky wisely, his head twisted on one side. "Go on, Miss Fairleigh."

"Then there was a noise outside, and I heard a motor car arrive and stop. Men came into the building, men who spoke in loud tones, and they, too, went into the adjoining room. There were more voices, louder voices, men discussing us, you, saying that you were to be shot in the morning. Glasses clinked again, and went on clinking. Then I heard a man snoring. I crept to the door

of the room and found it shut. But there was a fan-light above it for ventilation, and it was open. I fetched a chair, mounted it, and there they were: some important police official from Berlin already sprawling across the table, our janitor almost as sleepy as he, the corporal of our guard stretched on the floor, and two others who were smoking and drinking from huge pots of beer."

"And then?" asked Jim, his eyes flashing.

"I waited my time," she told them. "I crept along the passage. There was another room, and in it these clothes. Slung to a long board were keys. I tried three before I found one that would enter this lock."

"Then that explains," said Jim. "We heard the latch click. You found the right one at last?"

"Yes. But even then I wasn't sure that you were here. I had to wait and listen, and then, of course——"

She smiled at them again; and they, remembering the irritable way in which they had greeted her first arrival, flushed red.

"So far so good, Miss Fairleigh?" said Jim. "You have behaved most pluckily."

"Hear, hear! Should say so," declared Dicky, with undoubted sincerity. Then suddenly Jim's face went stern.

"Now it remains for us to act," he said. "First we want these handcuffs removed."

Gladys started and fumbled in a pocket. "I

forgot," she said, apologetically. "I have the keys here. Now."

"Now," said Jim, and his tones were just as stern as his face. "Lieutenant Dance will stay with you while I get out and see what we can do. It's eleven o'clock. The hour is just striking. Listen!"

They could hear the deep boom of the strokes and counted them. The stillness which followed was perfectly appalling. It made Dicky mutter again, it caused Gladys to shudder. Then from the direction of the station came a shrill whistle, and the increasing noise of a train approaching. Jim went to the door, opened it cautiously and stepped out. The passage was empty and very dark. A little way along it a light struck the ceiling, coming through a square opening high up.

"The fan-light," he told himself. "I'll have a squint at those fellows. "There they are, sure enough. Captain of Police from Berlin, tired out by his long journey. Shouldn't wonder if he's been on our track ever since we left that house by the back door. We've been shunted to and fro so much since then that I expect he's had a hard task. Now that he's got us, or imagines that he has, he's gone dead off asleep. The others——" He shrugged his shoulders. After all, it wasn't a pretty sight. But then Jim realized that these were strange times, when men's minds were vastly disturbed and when excesses were common. The others had already drowned their exhilarating

patriotism, or were in the process of doing so, with the aid of good German beer.

Jim stepped from the chair which he had found beneath the fan-light, and ran his hands over the doorway. "Good! A key. Meant to be turned. There it goes, and the row kicked up by that train will drown the sound. Have those fellows inside heard? Yes! No! Only looked up for a moment as the engine whistled again. Now for something more."

He went along the passage, and entered the room whence Gladys had undoubtedly obtained the keys with which she had opened their cell. It was a police barrack-room, and Jim chuckled. He went to the main entrance of the building and looked out. A car stood by the kerb, a large half-closed car with no one apparently in attendance. Jim's handsome face flushed, while resolution was stamped on every feature. Bear in mind that though young, perhaps twenty-five years of age, he was no chicken. He had travelled much and seen many countries. He had seen service too, having accompanied some of the combatants in the late Balkan war. But above the dangers and adventures which come to a soldier under arms were the many skirmishes, the innumerable tight places, and the host of awkward positions into which his duties in the Secret Service brought him. They had tried his mettle many a time. He had learned how coolness is sometimes of more consequence than thoughtless anger or action, and how

swift decision, courage and skill may extricate one even from a forlorn position. Add to such experiences his flights aloft. Flying was just the science to attract one of Jim's temperament, just as submarine work had attracted Dicky Dance. The danger in it, the spice which the unknown risk, the possibility of difficulty, brings, were there to lead them, and with them the subtle call which draws all brave men—the call to surmount those difficulties and dangers, to triumph and live in spite of them all.

So it was with Jim. As an airman banks and banks again to save an upset, swiftly deciding his action, so Jim cast the fortunes of his little party on one swift resolve. He went back to the cell at a run.

"Ready?" he asked, and both detected the sharp note. Gladys stood up. She looked pale but cool. Dicky's eyes were dancing.

"What next?" he asked.

"Come along. Now we're at their barrack-room. No, Miss Fairleigh, you needn't fear their coming out of the other room into which you looked. I've locked the door. Dicky, get hold of a cap and overcoat. I'll do the same. Miss Fairleigh is already sufficiently disguised for our purpose. That's the way. Buckle the revolver on and the sword as well. You look fine."

"You look sloppy," Dicky told him frankly, brutally. "That Dutch cast of countenance doesn't become a Prussian policeman."

It didn't. Jim had to confess that. He looked

mild, anything but the fierce official he wished to represent. But that could be altered. He dipped his hand in a jug of water standing at the back of the room, and soon washed the colour out of his moustache. A little soap applied afterwards, close attention to the mirror hanging over the fireplace, and the pointing of the ends of the hair covering his upper lip made him the very picture of a German.

"Do?" he asked curtly.

"Splendid. Now what?"

"There's a covered car outside. When I open the door you will wait here for a moment. As soon as I have the engine going and am in my seat you will come down, pull the door of the car open, and show Miss Fairleigh in. Then you'll join me in front."

"In front?" asked Dicky, taking a side glance at Gladys.

"Now. Open the door." Jim ignored his question. He knew the gallant sailor to have, sailor-like, a weakness for ladies' society. But this wasn't a time for pleasantries, or for anything indeed but fighting. He strode down the steps, inspected the dashboard of the car, gave an exclamation of delight when he saw thereon a switchboard, denoting that a dynamo was fitted, with a complete electric-lighting installation, and at once placed the throttle-lever in position. Everyone knows nowadays how to start and to manage a car. Jim wasn't behindhand. He had a natural aptitude for mechanics, and his work

with the flying squadrons had increased his knowledge. There was, therefore, no difficulty about the matter. He went to the front, gripped the starting handle, and swung the engine over. It fired at once. He clambered into the driving seat and switched on the lights. Then Dicky started. He came down the stairs as a sailor would, and dragged the door of the car open. Gladys was even then on her way to join him, when there was a startling interruption. Someone was already within the covered part of the car. A sleepy head showed, then a fellow in his shirt-sleeves began to clamber out of the car. No doubt the fellow imagined that this was another call to duty, and, grumbling, he prepared to don the coat lying in a corner of the car. Jim looked swiftly at the sailor. The latter winked in the gas-light.

"Get in," he whispered to Gladys, and helping her in, and foiling the man's attempt to reach his coat, he closed the door on her. Then he turned to discover an extremely startled, not to say indignant, individual staring hard at him. The man swore, at first beneath his breath, and then openly. He came a pace nearer, peered at the Lieutenant, and then gripped him by the arm.

"What is this? What is this?" he asked angrily. "You start my engine. You disturb me after three days and nights of racing about this country, and now you, you——Why, that was a woman in the overcoat of a police officer!" he shouted. "That was one of the suspects for whom we were search-

ing. You——I——Spies! Help!" he shouted in his loudest tones.

Dicky Dance treated him to an exhibition of nautical manœuvring. He wasn't as heavily built as the German, though equally tall. But he was as active as a cat, masterful enough for any situation, and as dashing as they make them in the navy. He struck the man on the point of his chin, making his whole frame shudder and a million stars light in his eyes. Then he dodged a furious rush, swung round swiftly, and as the man rushed again, landed a blow on his body. But the really clever part of his tactics lay in the swift movement which followed. Dicky kicked the Prussian's legs from beneath him and brought him sitting upon the ground with a thud which fairly shook the pavement. Then he clambered in beside Jim, who had been an eager spectator of the whole movement.

"All aboard!" the sailor informed him laconically. "Let her go full steam."

The engine raced. The first gear was already engaged, and now the clutch bit smoothly and took firm hold. They shot away from the pavement. Turning swiftly, Dicky caught a glimpse of Gladys in the back of the car, her face lit up by the rays from a gas-lamp they were then passing. Her eyes were flashing. She clapped her hands at him.

"George!" he exclaimed. "Plucky!"

The gears zipped again. They were in second. Jim swung her round a corner, dodged a tram which seemed to rush at him, swung again to avoid

a mob of frenzied people who were following a banner, cheering and shouting for war, and then once more touched his gear lever.

"Full steam it is, sir," he said.

Dicky grinned, a grin of huge enjoyment. Then he looked serious.

"Where to? What course? Jingo! There's one thing."

"Lots of 'em," Jim told him, with a careless laugh. "There's one above all others. I want food. So do you. So does Miss Fairleigh. So we stop on the outskirts of the town. As to the course, once we've bought provisions we'll swing round and take an opposite direction. For there'll be a fine old row after this. The police will do their utmost to get us."

"Ha! ha! ha!" Dicky gave full vent to his mirth. "Let 'em," he laughed. "I don't know that I should grumble much if they nabbed us, only for Miss Fairleigh's sake; for it will have been a fine little business. But, Jim, they mustn't get us. They mustn't capture you and me, and you know the reason."

Jim nodded. He knew. With their strong, protecting arms gone, the girl they escorted might meet with violence. He pressed his accelerator a little, as if he wanted action, and the car bounded along. A policeman at the corner of the next street stepped swiftly out to intercept them, then as suddenly stepped back and saluted.

Dicky took the salute with mathematical German

correctness. "My eye!" he grinned, "that for you or for me?"

It puzzled them immensely, for another policeman did the same. A corporal's guard, returning from rounding up some unruly and truant comrade, came to the salute as the car swung by. It was getting embarrassing. It was inexplicable. It was——

"Got it!" called Dicky. "Look here. Just above my head on the covered part of the car there's a police badge and a flag above it. There's a small lamp beneath, and I suppose that's meant to make the mark all the more conspicuous. Let's see. Yes, here's a switch not yet turned. How's that! Large as life. Hello! how's that for saluting?"

He was sitting back with easy assurance, as grave as a judge, as arrogant as any police-officer could be in the length and stretch of the Fatherland. Dicky was the very thing, saluting, saluting always, for this was a big town, and despite the fact that Germany had been secretly mobilizing for weeks past—had indeed but to put the finishing touches to make her preparations complete—there were still many men about. The cities and the towns were not yet denuded of adult men, as they would be later on, as France's cities and towns were already becoming; as far-away cities and towns in Russia were likely to become, as the Tsar's military preparations progressed and the troop trains took Russian manhood away. There were police officials still left, scores of them—scores

of uniformed men who clicked their heels and stood at attention as this important-looking car fled by, the car with the badge of a high police officer illuminated by electric rays. Arms swung to the salute to right and left, and nonchalantly, with an inexpressible appearance of arrogant boredom, but with punctilio and exactness nevertheless, the lieutenant responded.

"My uncle! if this is what it is to be all through, I'll want a relief," he laughed. "My arm's tired already. Whoa! Hard astern!"

They were nearly into a tram-car. Jim applied his brakes and the car swung and skidded. There was a crash and the framework shuddered.

"Only a lamp-post," said Dicky. "Near shave. Dead ahead again, my boy. Full steam."

Even the stern Jim smiled. He couldn't help it, for Dicky's light-heartedness was infectious. But where was this adventure to end? And what damage had they suffered?

The same thought must have been in the sailor's mind. He accepted a salute from a distinctly startled and bewildered official who had observed the accident, and then swung round to stare into the covered part of the car. They were away from the busier streets now, bowling along fast. But still there were lamps. They flashed past one, and the rays illuminated the interior of the car for a few bare seconds.

"Right as a trivet!" he cried, turning to Jim, for once again he had caught sight of a smiling

face, had received encouragement. It was a huge relief to the two hunted men. Their task was hard enough as it was, and likely to be harder. But, thank heaven! it was not to be complicated by hysterics, by fainting, by lack of courage on the part of the girl they were escorting.

S-zizz! The brakes bit, the car slowed. Jim pulled up in front of a restaurant situated on the outskirts of the city. As a matter of fact there were large works near, and here the men engaged took their midday meal. Leaving the engine running, he left his seat and hammered on the door, for the place was closed. There was a light showing from a window upstairs, however, and one above the door, showing the poster announcing that it was a restaurant. A half-dressed man opened the door a minute later, and appeared to be on the point of expostulating. Then the police garb, the badge on the car outside, and the obvious haste and importance of his visitors affected him. The old habit was too strong for the man, a man disciplined and controlled from his youth up, and ever taught to yield respect and obedience to authority as expressed by an official uniform. He also clicked his heels and saluted.

"We are following alien spies," Jim told him brusquely, bluntly, with the brutal directness of a domineering official. "They have passed this way."

The man quivered. Was he in for trouble? "This way. No, no, no!" he cried. "It is two

hours since we closed, and none have called us since. No one has passed the door, except, perhaps, on foot. I swear it."

"Ah! You swear it. We shall see. My information is that they passed here and called on you for food and drink."

The man protested, trembling now. No such thing had occurred. He swore to the truth of his statement by all that he held valuable, by the Kaiser, the Fatherland, the whole wealth and power of Germany.

"We shall see," Jim answered again, feigning anger, aware that in war such a tarradiddle as he was inventing was altogether fair. "We must follow. We have come far, and must go on at once. But even the police must eat. Bring food and drink. Quick! You shall be paid."

Anything to get rid of such visitors. The man bustled about in his back regions, and presently appeared laden with a basket. Jim snatched it up, paid what the man demanded, less a small sum—for officials of the Fatherland must not be overcharged—and rejoined his companions. Then, once more, they sped onward, this time into the darkness. Nor was it long before they called a halt and discussed the good things Jim had secured.

"And now?" asked the lieutenant, swinging his legs over the side of the car and smoking violently. "Where? North, south, east, or west? What? We wait for the plans of our chauffeur."

Miss Fairleigh smiled. She had been wonderfully plucky all through; but then, too, she had been distinctly hungry. The food had done her an immense amount of good, that and the cheery confidence of these two officers.

"England," she ventured, smiling.

"That's it. England, of course. But how?"

"We drive through as we are to the coast, and we drive through fast," said Jim. "Then—well, then all depends on circumstances. Only, England's the goal. Home, Dicky. We'll steer a course direct for the Old Country."

CHAPTER VI

Armageddon

THOSE few days which had elapsed since the mob of Berlin went frantic at the news that Great Britain had declared war against the Fatherland had been filled with excitements, with alarms, and with events of profound importance for the whole world. For what had appeared to far-away peoples as a purely European affair, a crisis in the Old World, was abundantly and with convincing force taking on the light of a world-wide epoch. Armageddon had come indeed. Five powerful nations were at war, and on the top of this there must needs come more alarming, if stirring, news. Little Belgium, trusting to the faith of her huge and immensely powerful neighbour, had been invaded, just as helpless Luxembourg had been. But whereas the latter puny state had offered no resistance to the Prussian arms, the King of Belgium and his plucky people had taken up the challenge. There had been severe fighting on the eastern frontier. Already the siege guns at the powerful fortress of Liége were at work, the fortress which lay in the line of direct march from Berlin to Paris.

Thus a sixth nation was added, while Servia was

already engaged with the Austrians in the south. Little Montenegro was joining in also, while rumour was busy with the intentions of Italy. Not yet had she moved. She was always well-disposed toward the British. She had nothing to gain by this conflict. It was abundantly clear that Germany was the aggressor. Therefore, neither by treaty nor by desire was Italy a likely combatant —unless, indeed, she were forced into the strife by unforeseen incidents.

That declaration of war, then, at midnight or thereabouts on August the 4th, set Europe in a whirl, and it may be of advantage to state briefly in what condition it found the combatants. Germany we have already mentioned. Her secret mobilization had not escaped the eyes of those likely to be engaged with her. She was ready to the last button on the blue-grey tunics of her fighting hosts. She was ready and willing, eager, in fact, since this was the day she had trained and prepared for. Her ally, Austria-Hungary, was also mobilized for her attack upon Servia, the little state which she proposed to chastise.

We then turn to other nations. In Russia, with vast distances to traverse, few good railways, and fewer good roads, it was supposed that mobilization of her millions of troops would take many weeks. Indeed, Germany counted upon this being the case. It was well known in France and elsewhere that this war, when it came—and come it would, for there were indications enough to prove that it was

Germany's policy—would be one in which time was of vast importance. Germany planned to invade France, to smash the French army, and then, with her wonderful railways to help her, to rush her hosts back to the Russian frontier and there smash the forces of the Tsar. On paper the plan looked excellent and feasible, particularly having in mind Russia's proverbial slowness and the record of her unpreparedness at the onset of the Russo-Japanese war. As an actual fact, it was a plan likely to be upset by almost a trifling incident. That incident took the form of fierce opposition on the part of Belgium. She was not unsuspicious of Germany's intentions, and at the first breath of invasion she, too, mobilized, and mobilized with wonderful rapidity. That fact alone, and the opposition at once offered to Prussian forces crossing her frontier, gave France time to complete her mobilization and the disposition of her troops. By then the Belgians were fighting desperately at Liége, against which fortified city the Germans threw themselves with fury, losing masses of their men. But of this later. We deal now with the broad outlines of this world-wide war. We have shown Germany meeting with opposition when she hoped to promenade through Belgium. We have recounted the successful collection of France's troops. There were rumours now that Russia's mobilization was already far advanced, her celerity of movement being unprecedented. Servia, too, was increasing her effective opposition to the

Austrians, while Switzerland and Holland were arming to the teeth to prevent invasion of their own territories.

Finally we come to Britain. To her honour she had refused to be bribed by soft speeches. To her lasting credit, her Imperial Defence Committee had formed counter plans which her Government were able to act on immediately. Not for nothing had Germany been steadily increasing her armaments and fleets, and thereby giving cause for uneasiness in England. Her deep-laid plot was seen through clearly. Measures were quietly taken to meet the day of battle when it came, and, as we have said, those measures were wonderfully effective. Our fleet was, in effect, mobilized before the war, and lay ready for grand manœuvres and the King's inspection. It disappeared from home waters as Britain sent her defiance to Germany. It was lost utterly and completely so far as people knew, lost in space, yet it was strong to protect and powerful to strike, a bulwark between us and our enemies. Even as Jim and his friends were entering their stolen car again, British transports were disembarking the first units of a large Expeditionary Force we had dispatched to join hands with the French. Behind them they left the army mobilizing, the Territorials called up, and the recruiting depots filled to overflowing. Britons were already standing shoulder to shoulder. The flag which has flapped so long above the nation's head was hoisted to the very heights and nailed there by popular en-

thusiasm. It was the same in Canada, in Australia and New Zealand, and a host of other places. In India the native soldiers clamoured to be led against the enemy, to have the privilege of fighting side by side with their white brothers. And even then, no doubt thanks to the Defence Committee, men were embarking and about to sail from India as from other parts.

Thus did the war commence, with such hosts in the field that nothing like it was ever seen before. It was to be a war of millions, with vast issues at stake, for defeat meant more than life to Great Britain. Prussia's huge numbers would undoubtedly tell their tale. The high training of her soldiers could not fail to have due effect, while her efficiency as regards armaments and details which go to help fighting was proverbial. Then, too, she was so fully prepared. The war had come at her time, precisely when she was ready. For the rest, Britain and France had nothing to complain of. They had trained men, though not so many as had Prussia; they had an efficiency not to be despised, and a grim courage and determination permeated their ranks, for already there were sufficient tales of German barbarity, of wrecked homes, of slaughtered women and children to make men grind their teeth with rage. If more were needed, was 1870 so long ago that France had forgotten the weight of the Prussian heel then placed so roughly on her neck, her spoiled homes, her injured, murdered people?

No. The thing was being repeated in Belgium. There must be no defeat. There must be dogged fighting. If retire they must, it must be to advance again when the Germans grew weaker, when the onward movement of Russian hosts caused the Kaiser and his generals to turn about to meet them.

For the rest, this war thundering throughout Europe was a silent war for non-combatants. Official news was of the briefest. Spies were everywhere, and, with this knowledge, the movement of troops and all plans were hidden behind an impenetrable curtain.

Thus commenced the war which had so soon plunged Jim Fletcher into trouble, and which saw him late that evening, after his escape from a German prison, driving a stolen car at furious speed in the direction of England. The fun was furious while it lasted. Then——

"What is called a real break-up," grunted the lieutenant, when he had contrived to get his breath back after the catastrophe which had so suddenly happened to them. "Who'd have thought they would have cut a trench across the road and left it unlighted?"

Jim ran to the overturned car and wrenched the door open. It was with a cry of relief that he realized that their passenger was uninjured.

"What happened?" she asked them coolly. "I was fast asleep, and the last thing I remember was that we were driving along at furious speed. I had more than half decided to knock and ask you to be

careful that you did not run right into the ocean, when I must have fallen asleep. So this is the end of the journey."

"Of the journey in the police car," Jim told her, admiring her spirit more than ever. For they had had a furious "spill". A yawning pit had of a sudden cut its way across their path. In the light of the lamps it looked like a shadow, a shadow which grew blacker as they approached. Then it was apparent in one nerve-stirring instant. It was a trench. It would certainly capsize them. The brakes had squealed. The car had lurched badly. Then the front wheels had dropped into the trench so that the radiator and front of the car rammed the far side. Then came a species of somersault.

"Beastly low game to play," growled Dicky. "Might have killed us. But I'm awfully glad you're not hurt, Miss Fairleigh. Sorry for the car. The police will have to buy another. What now, chauffeur? Wait! You're dismissed. Just fancy wrecking us in that manner!"

How he laughed! Jim looked sternly, almost angrily at him at first, and then from chuckling how he rocked with merriment! It wasn't Dicky's cheek that set them off. It was sheer, unadulterated relief at their escape, and, more than all, at the fact that the girl they escorted was uninjured and as game as ever. She beamed on them.

"If one may enquire," she said at last, when

all were more serious, "now that our chauffeur is dismissed——"

"Sacked!" laughed Dicky.

"What happens? Do we walk to the nearest German prison?"

"No. We send our chauffeur, now in disgrace, to find us a relief car."

"Let's get to serious business," said Jim, trying to appear severe. "Let's see—"

"Impossible! Too dark!"

"Don't behave like an idiot, Dicky," Jim begged him. "Let's consider. It's about three in the morning. We've been doing thirty-five miles an hour for some four hours, and should be somewhere near the German coast line. I went wide of the Dutch frontier on purpose. Police officials would have created an uproar there, and it is the first place they will send to when trying to trace us."

"So you took us right on into the heart of the enemy," laughed Dicky. "Looks to me as if we must be close to the coast and as if things were soon going to be more in my line. Coasts mean ships, Jim; ships aren't much use to a soldier."

"Except to get him home. Let's get ahead. It seems to me that that trench across the road looks as if we must be near the end of all things. Get some grub out of the car and fill your pockets. We may be glad of it. Then we'll put our best foot forward and see what happens."

Taking as much of the food as they could carry,

they set out through the darkness, thankful for the cool wind which blew in their faces. It had been a sultry night, and even rapid progress through the air had failed to cool them. Walking was hard work, especially at the pace Gladys set them, and the freshness of the early morning was therefore most acceptable. They trudged on for an hour, perhaps, and then halted as the grey morning mist lifted. Then the light increased rapidly, and presently they were standing in a warm flood of orange rays which poured out of the misty east. They were on an elevation, and perhaps three hundred yards distant the earth seemed to be suddenly cut away. Then, far in the distance, lay a smooth, dull-grey expanse over which the mist still hovered. One dull spot in the dim offing attracted Dicky's attention.

"Heligoland for a shilling!" he exclaimed. "We're somewhere off the Elbe, and right on the naval base of the Germans. My eye! This means business. What on earth made you select such a spot for embarkation?"

He wasn't out of temper; merely quizzical. For it became apparent as the minutes passed and the mist lifted, sucked up in sweeping wraiths by the warmth of the sun rays, that Jim had actually brought them to a centre of the utmost importance. Heligoland certainly lay in the offing, that despised piece of rock which Britain gave as an act of conciliation. See the use Prussia had made of it! Millions had been spent on the crumbling rock.

It was concrete and steel-bound in all directions. It harboured a destroyer base, it sheltered Dreadnoughts, while its central parts displayed disappearing hangars for Zeppelins.

"This means a hanging and a shooting job," Dicky suddenly whispered to Jim, drawing him aside, serious all of a sudden. "Can't you see, man?"

"See! Of course. But we're not taken yet. As to hanging—I fully understand. We're looking on at the fleet with which our island is to be conquered. At least, that's the German tale."

"The one she'll have to repeat to the British fleet before she's successful. But—I say—this is a stunner."

"It isn't worse than the hole we were in yesterday. Or was it the day before? Somehow everything seems to have got into a horrible state of confusion. I'm not a bit sorry for myself or for you, Dicky. If we were alone——"

"Which we're not," the lieutenant reminded him unnecessarily, almost angrily, casting a glance across at Gladys.

"I said, if—if we were alone, it would be fine to get through and beat these beggars. Even capture wouldn't matter so frightfully badly after the times we've had in getting here. But——"

"Quite so," said the lieutenant. There was no need for further explanation. It must ever be the same when men are placed in similar circumstances. Alone they can fend for themselves or

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go under. They can meet the fortune of war. With a woman to protect it is different. Inevitably in such cases she is likely to hamper their movements.

"Hang it all! Here we are, so we've got to make the best of it. But it's a hole," the sailor jerked out, his chin thrust forward obstinately.

"A hole. Yes. Not worse than the others, as I've said already. We must find some place in which to hide. Let's get off the road in the first place."

They led the way across a stretch of moorland till a rise hid them from the road. By then they were on a long slope descending to the water. A shepherd's hut lying in their path attracted their attention and was immediately invaded. Then Jim set out with Dicky, both having first divested themselves of their police overcoats. Stealthily making their way seawards, they presently reached a spot which almost overhung the water.

"Wire entanglements," said Jim, pointing downward to where lines of wire glistened in the sunlight. "Those look as though they had been erected a month and more ago. Germany's ready in case of a dash in this direction. But I suppose that that is impossible?"

"At present out of the question. Look over there." Dicky jerked his head to the west. "That's a mine-layer, and she'll be sowing the water around the mouth of the Elbe and Heligoland with mines

the location of which has been decided on months ago. That's why—to mention only one of many reasons—a British force couldn't make a dash on this coast line. Look at the fleet. Beauties, ain't they?"

With a sailor's love of ships he spoke admiringly of the long, dark hulls showing now beneath the shadow of the distant rocky island. Indeed, the whole scene was one to arouse enthusiasm. It was a brilliant day, and the combination of sea and coast and a smiling background of country were truly enchanting. Then Heligoland was set like a glittering jewel in the distance, while here and there, many grouped together and stationary, others dodging hither and thither, and these all small craft, were the ships of the Kaiser. This was the fleet built with the sweat of a nation, with the gold wrung from an already oppressively-taxed people—but mark you, a people willingly submitting to that oppressive, heart-breaking extortion, eagerly doing their part in the work which was now to come to fruition, or to burst in misery as have the gigantic schemes of other tyrants.

"A Zeppelin," said Jim, pointing to a spot above the island. "If only—if only we could get aboard her as we did aboard the car!"

"If only we could steal the moon," laughed his companion. "But there are other ways and means than cars and Zeppelins. There are boats; and since England lies a good three hundred miles across the water, why, boats have it. That is, we

have to choose a boat. Now, down below there, there's as neat a little jetty as ever I saw. I imagine it belongs to a species of coast-guard station. If they have a boat, we might——"

"And put off to sea in her? Impossible!" declared Jim. "By ourselves, yes. I'm willing to take every risk. As it is——" he shrugged his shoulders, and the sailor shrugged his in silent agreement.

"Though she's got grit enough for anything," he told the soldier. "But we needn't discuss the boat longer, because there doesn't happen to be one. Ain't those fellows busy wagging to the fleet! They're practising. See that destroyer lying well outside? She's replying. It'll be a code they're using, I expect. Eh? No, it isn't. It's the usual."

Quickly he read off the signal: "All well. Coast patrolled five kilometres each way. No strangers. Looked for strangers. None."

"That's satisfactory," said Jim. "Lucky you can speak German. But I wish you were a little more fluent. Then perhaps you'd get down there and take the place of a coast-guard. Dutchman, German policeman, coast-guard in a matter of three days. That'd be sporting."

Dicky looked as if he would gladly have undertaken such an adventure. But, of course, the scheme was idiotic. So they settled down to smoke and to watch, Jim returning after a while to reassure their companion. It was late in the

afternoon when the flag-waggers became rather more restless and energetic. Dicky watched their signals with some anxiety.

"Destroyer's rung 'em up," he told Jim bluntly. "They're on our track—that is, the police are. Coast-guards are to make a search inland. Reliefs will be sent to them."

It was serious news, and roused their apprehension. They watched a little longer, and saw men muster in the yard of the coast-guard station. Then they followed the swift rush in their direction of a pinnace.

"Reliefs," said Dicky laconically.

"That hut will be sure to attract attention," Jim told him. "Stay here. I'll fetch Miss Fairleigh and make sure that nothing is left in the hut. We'll hide up here for a while and then sheer off. It's getting misty again, and that should help us."

But it was an anxious time for all, for voices could be heard across the moor. Men shouted to one another, till it became apparent that the searchers were widely scattered. Indeed, thanks to that, Jim and his friends escaped, one of the coast-guards passing within fifteen yards of them. But they were hidden in a hollow, and the heather and the bracken, then in all its glory, covered them completely.

"Another beat up and they may find us," said Jim. "They will be out with lanterns to-night, so that we'll get no sleep, and that's serious con-

sidering we're all pretty well dead beat. To-morrow, if they happen to have found even the smallest clue to us, they'll turn out some of their host of soldiers, and then——"

"We shan't be here."

"Perhaps not," Jim agreed with the lieutenant. "But where?"

"On that pinnace, I imagine," laughed Gladys. "You made free with a car a little while ago. All's fair in war, isn't it, Captain Fletcher?"

Dicky chortled. Jim flushed to the roots of his hair.

"You'd risk it?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"And Dicky?"

"Game for it. Let's go now. If she's a steam pinnace you'll have to turn stoker. I sacked you when a chauffeur. If you behave yourself I'll take you on below as stoker. Now, Miss Fairleigh."

They groped their way through the gathering mist till the wash of water against a rocky coast smote their ears and told them that they were not far from their destination. Jim stumbled against a block of concrete and exclaimed loudly. Then Dicky whispered to them that they were at the very gates of the yard in which they had seen the coast-guards muster.

"Down below there is the boat," he muttered. "It's a long step on our way to England, home, and beauty."

CHAPTER VII

Dicky Dance's Element

Down below them, at the foot of the mole, lay the long, dimly-visible form of the pinnace which they had observed bringing reliefs to the coast-guard station. A concrete stairway led down to the water, and Jim and Dicky were already on the lowest step.

"Pull her in," the latter whispered. "Not sure yet whether she's steam- or motor-driven, though I think the latter. You know all about motors, Jim?"

"A trifle," was the laconic reply. "Without a light to see by, it'll be a little difficult to tell how she works and where one opens the throttle. Should say she was motor-driven, and exhausts through the funnel, which makes her look like the old steam pinnaces. Here she comes. There won't be any waiting, eh?"

"Not a second. I'll call Miss Fairleigh."

But she was already beside them, waiting as they hauled on the painter and pulled the dark form of the pinnace in. Jim was quite right as to there being no light aboard. The boat was almost buried in obscurity, and how they were to set her engines going seemed quite a puzzle.

"But it'll be done," Jim whispered. "Let's get

aboard and then push her off. Those fellows will have to sing before they can board her. Steady does it, Dicky."

The sailor was already aboard, leaping actively from the step right on to the deck she carried forward. He set the boat swaying heavily, and the water washing in tiny wavelets against the mole. Then he stretched out an arm, and Jim handed Gladys over to him. Leading her to a seat forward of the funnel, and just behind the shelter of a "cab", they plunged into the cockpit. Jim swiftly passed his hands over the machinery there, and his fingers almost at once lit upon the unmistakable form of a magneto.

"Motor-driven," he told Dicky with a chuckle of delight. "She'll be fast, silent too, for we couldn't hear her exhaust, and there won't be a spark by which to detect her. The deuce of it is to set her going. Have you cast her loose?"

"Not yet. It'll take a bare second or so to cut the painter, and if I did so now we'd be sure to drift away into the pool and perhaps turn and swing till we had lost direction. As she lies now we know she's headed for the open. A lamp is what we want."

"A match would do."

"Ah!" the exclamation came from the sailor. "Some of those police fellows looked after their comfort," he laughed. "There's a box of matches in this inner pocket, and—by all the stars!—there's a bundle of cigars. Have a smoke, Jim?"

The soldier grunted a refusal. "Let's get to

business," he growled. "Quick! I can hear men calling."

They lifted their heads and looked towards the land. Above them, overshadowing them, was the concrete mass of the mole. Farther back, men were walking. They could plainly hear the sound of their footfalls, while voices were distinct.

"They are coming back to the pinnace," declared Dicky hoarsely.

"Then push her off. Wait! Give me the box of matches and your coat. Tell Miss Fairleigh to lie down in the bottom of the cab. When you've shoved the pinnace off, get to the tiller. It's your job. Once I get the engine going, the rest is for you to see to."

They needed no further discussion, for here the work was as happily divided as it well might be. Left to himself Lieutenant Dance could have started the motor without a doubt. But his post was the tiller of a certainty.

"Let her rip," he said, coming back from casting off the painter and pushing the boat out from the mole. "Let her have all you can."

There came a grunt from the position which Jim occupied. He was kneeling beneath Dick's huge police coat, which he had thrown over his head and shoulders. From beneath the coat there came the dim reflection of a light and the sound of levers moving. Then followed an exclamation of satisfaction, while at the same moment someone called from the mole above.

"Look out," whispered Jim. "I've found the starting handle. There she goes. No she don't. Fired in one cylinder and then missed. Another turn. Now she's off."

The engine roared. Jim put his hand on the throttle and closed it down. His hand went to the gear lever the next instant. Someone was shouting at them from the top of the mole, now ten yards away. Two men were already at the bottom of the stairway.

"Ahoy there! Who's aboard the pinnace?"

"Found she'd got away from her mooring," Jim called back, his German as fluent as any native's. "Went in for her and am just getting her under way. Show a light over there, so that I can bring her back safely."

As yet they did not suspect him, though, to be sure, the voice was not familiar. But then, voices never are when a crew has been gathered of a sudden and has joined with other men. Those on the mole were not sure that it was not one of the coast-guards who had boarded their pinnace, while the few men of the station who had now joined the group imagined that it must be one of the crew who had so speedily gone out to secure the boat. It was a petty officer, sharp, swift to suspect, who first stimulated them to action.

"Halt there!" he shouted. "Stop that engine and bring the boat ashore by means of her paddles. Which of the men is that?"

The question was unanswerable.

"Let her rip!" called Dicky, seizing the tiller. "I've got my bearings, thanks to those fools shouting on the mole. Full steam ahead, Jim, just as you did with the car."

The pinnace was already under way, the engine running slowly. Jim opened the throttle. Instantly the boat shot ahead, her screw churning the water in rear into foam and splashing spray high into the air. Then shots sounded and bullets splashed the surface of the pool.

Dicky took off his police hat. Jim laughed loudly. "The first shots of the war," he said.

"For us, yes," rejoined the lieutenant. "Let's hope we'll soon be in the thick of the fighting. Let her rip, Jim. Those fellows are warming up a little. I say, Miss Fairleigh—frightened?"

"Not a bit," came the cheery answer. "What luck we are having! But where do we go?"

"Out to join the British fleet," declared the lieutenant, sitting astride the tiller, careless of the bullets scuttling past him. But only a fluke shot could damage them now, for the mole, the men on it, even the mass of land behind, were hidden in obscurity. In front, out toward the open sea, it was a trifle lighter. Not sufficiently light, it is true, to make accurate steering possible, or to allow one to avoid an object; but enough to give the rough direction. Dicky plunged a hand into his pocket and produced a cigar. Leaning toward Jim, who squatted in the cockpit, he offered the weed to him.

"Made in Germany," he smiled. "Best take it while you can get it. Soon they won't be able to be bought for love or money. The Germans'll be too busy fighting us to have time to make weeds. Pah! Haven't they got a strong flavour too! Still, any port in a storm. Get yours going, and then hand it to me to get mine alight. There's no fear of our being seen at this distance."

It seemed indeed as if the waters were altogether deserted, though without a doubt the enemy's vessels were in the neighbourhood. Those shots had been heard, and already there was a brilliantly white eye behind them where they guessed the coast-guard station must be—an eye which flickered swiftly and irregularly, which went out altogether on occasions and then burst into flickering, spasmodic life again, winking violently, sending a message to the offing. Out there, too, were other winking eyes, busily responding. It made Dick and his chum sigh to get back to their comrades and take part in the work which they knew Great Britain and her allies had to do—to get back to their units, where they too could employ their talents and their training. Meanwhile matters were most promising. They had done wonderfully well, and the adventure was really most exhilarating.

"A destroyer picked up the warning message, I expect," reflected the lieutenant. "She'll send it on to others, and they'll be on the move already. Sing out if you see sparks from a funnel."

"I'll do that," came from Miss Fairleigh.

"Captain Fletcher will want to watch his engine. You have the steering to do. Surely I can do something."

Jim had found a lamp now, and had it lighted and stored in a locker. Every now and again he shrouded himself in Dicky's overcoat and inspected his engine, looking to see that the lubricator was working. He kept his motor going at a rapid pace all the while, but not quite at its utmost revolutions.

"May want the little bit in hand," he whispered to the sailor. "How long will it take us to clear the land and get into the offing?"

"All depends. We've got to clear Heligoland first of all. After that it's just a toss-up. Depends on the British fleet. If they've been smart—and I'll give my best boots if they haven't—the German fleet will be nicely bottled up in and around these home waters. Of course, they'll have a few scouts out, and one of 'em might drop on us. But we've time to get well off the land before morning, and if the petrol holds out——"

"Tank full almost to the brim. There's a gauge fitted, so there's no making a mistake," Jim told him curtly.

"Then we've a fine chance. But our job is to get out as far as possible."

There came a gentle call from the girl sheltering in the cab forward.

"I see flames ahead," she said.

The sailor shielded his eyes and stared in that direction.

"Destroyer making down here as fast as she can," he said. "Slow her for a moment, Jim. Now we'll cut off on this course for a while. Let her rip!"

Five minutes later he called for the engine to be slowed again, and once more swung the pinnace. Gladys gave a little shiver in the darkness of the cab, for a long, low form had rushed past the pinnace some two minutes before, missing her by the merest fraction. It was then that Jim, without orders, had shut his engine down almost completely, while Dicky had unconsciously pushed his tiller over and sent the pinnace away on a course at right angles.

"Phew!" he called. "That was a close one. Nearly ran right over us, and as it is we've taken a lot of her wash aboard. It was nearly a case of being swamped."

They plunged onward, their craft now bobbing swiftly to a swell which was coming in from the seaward side of Heligoland. Now and again they saw signal lamps flash, though no doubt the wireless apparatus of the German fleet was busily engaged all the while in sending silent messages about them. Twice in succession they crept past destroyers plunging across the expanse of water, and once they were loudly challenged. But the two men kept on undaunted. Then, slowly, the darkness lifted, and those orange tints again swept across the eastern heaven. Dicky stood up precariously, the tiller held between his legs, and, shading his eyes, looked round the horizon.

"Must have made a fine run of it," he said. "Well done, Jim!"

"Well done, indeed!" echoed Gladys from the cab.

"Thank the motor and the men who constructed it," came the rejoinder. "She's done well, and I calculate we have enough petrol still to run us for five hours. That would hardly fetch England."

"Hardly," the sailor agreed. "We shall have to make some sort of jury-mast and rig a sail."

"A sail! How? Where's the stuff coming from?"

"That has to be seen. There may be some down in those lockers ranged round the boat. If not, wouldn't these police greatcoats secured together catch some of the breeze and help us homeward? Helloo! A ship!"

The thin mist which, as it had done on the previous day, lay at early dawn over land and water, was lifting every second. The light in the eastern sky had grown, too, and had now changed from the softest of orange hues to the most brilliant and burning of scarlet. Set in the rays of the rising orb was a large ship, a ship which became momentarily more clearly distinguishable, and which seemed to puzzle the lieutenant excessively.

"If a fellow only had a pair of binoculars!" he grumbled, shading his eyes now with his police hat. "That ship beats me. Here, have a cigar, Jim. A smoke will make us cheery and do instead of breakfast. There's some grub in my overcoat

and Miss Fairleigh will be glad of it. Now what can that ship be? Destroyer? No. Gunboat? Not it. Cruiser? Far too small. And she seems to be lumpy all over. She's moving slowly out to the west and north, and—she dropped something overboard then. I——Jim, what do you make of her?"

But Jim could hardly be expected to help his nautical comrade. He wasn't a sailor, though he had had many a trip in ships, and indeed had once accompanied Dicky in a submarine. No, Jim's talents were engaged in another direction; and though one may speak of him as an all-round man, he was best employed in two directions. His knowledge of languages, his swift intuition and daring, had made him invaluable to the Intelligence Department of His Majesty's War Office. His flights through the air were for him a species of recreation. But there, too, he excelled, and was likely to prove his value in the campaign then opening.

"Can't make anything of her," he said.

Dicky whistled. "She's spotted us," he said. "I've got her measure. Push her ahead, Jim. She—that is, the ship yonder—will be trying a game at long bowls with us. I'll tell you what she is now. She's a mine-layer. That gallery running out aft and the lumps you see about her give her job away completely. Push on. Bizz! There she goes. Don't be scared, Miss Fairleigh."

There was a flash in the distance, then smoke burst from the for'ard part of the distant vessel. A

shell struck the water half a mile away from the pinnace, ricochetted, screamed across her bows perhaps two hundred paces ahead, and disappeared in the water.

"She's got wireless fitted, I expect," said Jim. "She knew us the moment her watch's eyes fell on us. Hooroo! Let her rip along. This pinnace will want a heap of hitting."

They rather enjoyed the adventure, for the mine-ship made wretched practice. She placed shells in front, behind, and on either flank of the pinnace. But never once did her missiles even splash the occupants.

"Which is a test of good shooting," cried Dicky, elated at this little brush. It was whetting his appetite for what was coming. He laughed and pulled at his cigar, while Jim grinned as the shots went wide, and jerked at his lubricator. Then the girl forward cried out loudly:

"Another ship. A little one. Far out."

Dicky gave vent to a howl of delight. "British, or I'll eat my boots, and—and this infernal German overcoat! Pile it on, Jim! Send her along! That's the best thing I've seen since we left Berlin."

The firing from the mine-ship ceased of a sudden, and they saw her swinging round to make off landward. The other vessel came on with a rush, and in a little while lay abreast of the pinnace.

"Ahoy there!" they heard. A smart young officer hailed them from the gunwale. "What nationality?"

Dicky Dance withdrew his cigar and shouted back with vigour: "English as you are, Fitzgerald. Come along closer. We ain't the Germans you'd take us for—and we've a lady aboard—and, Fitzgerald, we've a little bit of news for you. That was a mine-layer blazing at us. She'll be coming out again, and——"

"We'll nab her. Why, it's Dicky Dance, and——"

"Captain James Fletcher, Flying Corps. Heave a line there. This is Miss Fairleigh. Miss Fairleigh, Lieutenant Fitzgerald. Fitz, my boy, we've come through from Berlin, and have had to borrow a few things from the Germans. First these clothes. Handsome, ain't they? Then a whole police motor car, then this pinnace."

Men had crowded to the rail and were listening. There were grins of delight on their faces, and as the pinnace was hauled closer a cheer burst from them. Nor were they more delighted than the two officers who stepped aboard after Miss Fairleigh.

"We can get right away to business," said Jim, his face beaming. "Fitzgerald says he'll put us aboard a dispatch ship lying out there in the offing. We'll be in London to-night. To-morrow I'll be aboard a transport on my way to join the allied army. George! How I'm longing for it!"

"And I to have a whack at that mine-layer. Fitzgerald's already sent a wireless, and I mean to be in the business."

Thus had soldier and sailor come back to home

and to more serious business. The fun in rescuing Miss Fairleigh and themselves from the clutches of the Germans had been fast and furious while it lasted. Now they were about to enter upon a more serious and a far more desperate stage of the conflict. For Germany was ready, had been ready for weeks, as we have pointed out. Success in arms was almost sure to go to her at the beginning. Later—who could say?

"We'll keep our own end up, never fear," said Dicky, as he bade his two friends a smiling adieu a little later. "The Navy'll singe the Kaiser's whiskers yet and keep the enemy busy."

The ships parted at length. Then Jim watched the shores of England becoming visible. He escorted his companion to London, and saw her off to Portsmouth. Then he tore away to the War Office.

"Ready for duty," he reported, having sent his name up to the right department.

CHAPTER VIII

Desperate Fighting

For days the place had been a seething mass of men and horses and guns and military conveyances of every sort, size, and description. Transports had been sliding into the port at every dawn—transports crammed with jubilant men, and escorted by destroyers and other ships, which lay always black and forbidding out in the offing, watching the disembarkation, keeping a look-out for the enemy. Boulogne in those days did not know itself. It was transformed. The inhabitants were crazy with a long succession of rapid and unprecedented happenings all crammed into those few early days of the war. And how hoarse they were with cheering "Tommy Atkins"!

Troop trains left the railway yards very frequently in the days of which we are speaking, trains which went off no one knew where, not even the engine-drivers. The roads outside, too, were crammed, for there were being repeated the same events which people in England had witnessed. Hundreds and hundreds of motor vans were pressing their way into France, vans for the most part now

filled with stores, though over in England they had taken the western road to the coast empty, as a rule, rolling along in droves, day and night, without intermission. Jim Fletcher had made his way down by car also—a quick car, which soon outstripped the tractors hauling the apparatus of his flying squadron. And huge had been his enjoyment as he went, his soldier-servant, one Matthews, beside him.

"It's as good as a circus, sir, it is," this individual confided to him, for there was no hard-and-fast line drawn by discipline between Jim and Matthews—nor, indeed, between the British officer and his men generally. With them it was not as it obtains in the German army, where an officer is superlatively above his men—in his own precious opinion—where it is an insult even to lie wounded in hospital with him, or, when a prisoner, to be herded with the rank and file in the same prison.

"And to see them chaps a-transforming some of the lorries, it does yer good, it does," asserted Matthews.

Weird, indeed, were the sights. Flocks of people at every village, gaping and wondering. Men aboard some of the cars, smoking and lolling. Others scrambling about, clinging to the sides like flies, painting the vans a grey colour. Every brand of bread sold in London, every large Stores, a host of business people whose names are household words, were represented on the sides or backs of that motley lot of rushing wagons. They were

still in evidence over at Boulogne, a commercial invasion of France, though the majority had succumbed to the brushes of the busy Tommies. Then, as we have said, they scattered; the roads were packed with them. They went off in a whirl of choking dust, off to the front and the army.

Whizz! How it did Jim good to hear the engine of his fast monoplane start whirling. He revelled in the gusty breeze which swept past his face as the machine sat anchored, ready for flight. And then the joyousness of that scooping rush, that sudden depression of the tail, the swift, lightning bounce from the ground!

"Let her go!" He lifted one hand and waved it. At once the mechanics in khaki stood aside and the machine swept onward. Up, up he soared, till men below were like tiny ants, foreshortened, almost unrecognizable. Then he shot off to the north-east and at last lay over Liége, then fiercely attacked by the Germans. The crackle of rifles, the crash of artillery, and the sweeping roar of mitrailleuses almost drowned the sound of his engine. A veritable earthquake was taking place beneath him as he floated this way and that, carefully scrutinizing every point beneath him. And fortunate for him was it that the Belgian commander was aware of his coming; otherwise, thousands of rifles would have directed their bullets at the aeroplane. As it was, the missiles flung at him by the German host were sufficient.

"Like a hail-storm," he smiled, suddenly ele-

vating the planes of his machine and sending it shooting upward. "The wings are perforated in a hundred places, and if they had managed to hit the body of the plane or the engine, or myself—huh! there'd have been an end of my soldiering."

That was the way in which members of the Flying Corps looked on such happenings. Jim had inadvertently descended a little too low when hovering over the German position, and at once had had his machine riddled. As he shot to a higher elevation shrapnel shell burst like squibs not two hundred yards below, doing no harm, but warning him to keep at a distance.

Jim banked his machine, shot away over the ring of forts which encircle the city of Liége, lying a mile and more beyond its outskirts, and floated for a while over them. He could thus look right into the forts, and, soldier as he was, and trained in such matters, he marvelled at their construction. For each lay like a closely-drawn map, every feature distinguishable.

"And the Germans seem to have come along in such a hurry that they have got ahead of their siege guns," he said to himself. "Of course, when they arrive those forts will be heavily pounded; and if the latest reports are true, that Krupps have produced a mobile siege gun of 16-inch capacity, then the bombardment will be terrific. Ah! That's developing into a murderous attack."

The scene he watched was indeed vastly interesting. He sat there in his rushing aeroplane as it

were detached from his comrades below—for were not these Belgians the stanchest of comrades?—and looked down upon as fierce a conflict as could be well imagined. Also, he saw with amazement that the German hosts investing the fortress of Liége—a fortress which their commanders had told the men would fling its doors open wide in welcome, and which the arrogant Kaiser and his generals had long ago brushed aside as of no consequence, seeing that resistance from Belgium was utterly impossible, the act of mad people and therefore not to be thought of—these German hosts were advancing over the open ground which had been cleared all round the forts in close formation, the men of each battalion wedged closely together. Brigades moved in solid formation, whole divisions banked in serried lines, brigade after brigade, one supporting the other, those behind ready to fill the place of their comrades in front when they had fallen. Jim was to see in the next half-hour as murderous an exhibition of modern war as could be well imagined, an example of what we have come to far transcending the prophetic attempts of imaginative writers.

For Germany had set out to conquer. Indeed, as this fearful war of the nations progressed, everyone was to learn that with the Prussian host there was a fierce and furious determination to conquer. We have said already that this was a people's war, that from the smooth-tongued, arrogant Kaiser downward there had been for years now a na-

tional conspiracy to make ready, to prepare for the conquest of Europe. If that were accomplished, the conquest of the remainder of the world would follow. Nothing less would appease a fierce national ambition. Thus recklessness was to be expected—reckless bravery on the part of the German rank and file, reckless and wicked disregard of the sacrifice of men's lives on the part of officers and those in higher command. It was terrific, then, to watch those brigaded Prussians march across the open ground to attack the forts and the chain of trenches between them.

Of a sudden the crash of artillery died down, then a perfect roar awoke the temporary silence. Looking downward, Jim saw lanes cut through the German hosts. He saw shells bursting above the men, in front of them, amongst their very ranks, and noted the ragged lanes, the huge holes, the horrible gaps left by the Belgian gun practice. Then a sheet of flame leapt from those almost invisible trenches, whereat the nearest brigades staggered. They came to a halt, their men, those who still stood, shuddering. Yet the rare courage, the desperate determination of the Prussians was proof even against this further exhibition of Belgian preparedness. The lines staggered and then pulled themselves together, men stepping up from behind to fill the gaps. Loud shouts came from the soldiers, shouts which could be heard amidst the crash of artillery and the rattle of rifles and machine-guns. Ah! The lines were advancing

again, they—they were gone, they were broken! The Prussian host was in full retreat, smashed by the terrible fire poured upon it by the Belgians in the trenches and by the men commanding the guns in the forts. That line of gallant men disappeared with amazing rapidity, leaving, however, piled-up dead and wounded behind it. Jim shuddered. Even a soldier may shudder. Then he planed down to the ground and hastened to report to the Belgian commander.

"More men are massing for an attack," he told him. "The brigades now in retreat passed between their reserve brigades, and as I came down the latter were moving forward. It looks to me, sir, as if they would now attempt to break through by sheer weight of numbers."

At once he was invited to sketch the position of the brigades he had seen advancing, and was heartily thanked for his information.

"We have a hard task before us, Monsieur le Capitaine," he was told. "Everything has had to be so hurried, while the Bosches [Germans] were fully ready. But we have shown them that Belgium is not to be trampled on, and Britain and France will support us."

Jim left the fort and made his way to the line of trenches stretching between it and the next. For, as we have explained, a number of forts encircled the city of Liége, each at some distance from the city and from its fellows. All were constructed on the most modern lines, and were masses of

ferro-concrete, surrounded by deep, bricked ditches, the outer edges of which were manned by riflemen occupying a ledge built for that purpose, while machine-guns were placed at intervals. The central part of the forts was occupied by movable cupolas or gun-turrets, with convex tops of armoured steel, and with disappearing guns which could command a wide field, and could by their cross-fire aid in the defence of neighbouring forts. As may be imagined, there were hundreds of yards of open ground between the elevated positions occupied by the forts, and since an enemy might rush through such spaces, the garrison of Liége, none too numerous for the work before it, had constructed trenches. As Jim made his way along one of them he noticed wire entanglements stretched like a web in advance.

"They are coming, the Bosches," he told an officer who accosted him, told him in the best of French.

"Then let them come," was the gallant answer. "Monsieur, I tell you, never have I seen such bravery and such murder. These Germans are forced on by sheer fury. They would hack us to pieces if they could but get within reach of us, and — well, they must buy their success at the highest price possible."

It was strange to see those gallant little Belgians lying in the long trench, smoking and chatting, while others watched the country in advance. They might have been on a picnic, for they were laugh-

ing and joking; while behind them, situated in a convenient hollow, were their busy cooks, their camp-fires smoking and their field-kitchens making ready for the next meal. Then there came a sharp order. At once men rose to their feet, grasping their rifles, while cooks and butchers left their field-kitchens. The hurried tramp of men coming from behind them announced the arrival of reinforcements.

"And so it has been for two days and nights, Monsieur le Capitaine," the officer told Jim. "Our numbers are too small to man the forts and all the intervals. Thus we have to march men from one space to another, and already they are weary. It has been march and fight, and fight and march since the Germans first attacked us. And, mon Dieu! the Bosches are angry. Their fury is something to see."

"Even aloft there I could tell that they were desperate," Jim answered.

"Ah! Then you are of the Flying Corps. I salute you," said the officer. Brave man himself, he could appreciate bravery in others; and he, like his comrades, had a great appreciation of the air service. But it was not the time for mutual congratulations. Far in advance a grey-blue line was in evidence. Its approach was heralded by the coming of a swarm of Taube aeroplanes, which floated very high above the forts and trenches, and which showed the whole world, and France and England in particular, a new use for this

modern arm in warfare. For Prussia had trained airmen not alone to observe the countryside and report the movement and position of troops. It had aviation officers who went aloft with trained observers, who quickly located the trenches of the opponents and signalled their exact position to the German artillery. Thus the range was given to them, and almost at once, as that long, blue-grey line came into evidence, guns spoke from the distance and shrapnel began to burst over the long trench in which Jim had taken his position.

"At first it is disagreeable, yes, Monsieur," the officer told him, with a shrug of the shoulders. "You have experienced shell-fire before?"

Jim smiled. He had,—very much so. "I accompanied the Balkan armies," he said. "These Germans, however, are exceedingly accurate, and they get the range very quickly. It is a point which our air service will have to consider. Ah, the attack is now developing."

They were coming along very quickly, those Prussian soldiers, quickly and compactly, the fire of their artillery plunging over their heads. The guns in the forts were replying, and Jim watched as the distant shells burst over the hidden Prussian batteries. He crouched in the trench, his fingers in his ears for a while, for the screech of shells deafened him. Then he stood erect and watched the battle developing, watched it with a half-repressed shudder. Truly it was terrific, and the bravery and recklessness of the Prussians wonder-

ful. For on the ground level the havoc wrought amongst those closely-packed men was more clearly distinguishable. The Belgian guns were shattering some of the columns. Jim could see whole lines rock and halt and then melt away, as if some fiery blast had struck them. He stood there and saw the ranks of one brigade torn and shattered by shell-fire, and then brought to a standstill by the rifle bullets now ripping amongst them from the trenches—saw it all through a hail of shrapnel which the Prussian guns never ceased to pour forth. A man beside him gave a sudden cry and fell backward. Jim bent over him. He was dead. Beneath him was another Belgian, his eyes half-closed. A German bullet had drilled a hole through his body. Jim gripped the rifle of the one who had just fallen, took his ammunition pouch, and once more faced the enemy. That long, blue-grey line which he had seen holed and riven and shattered by gun- and rifle-fire had gone entirely. Heaps of dead marked its line of march. Flying figures showed the remnants. But the ground was not open. A long, blue-grey line, solid, compact, marching rapidly to fill the self-same position, was already in evidence.

"And behind it another brigade and yet another," said the officer. "Thus does Germany mean to attack. I say this, Monsieur; this war will at first be one of vast numbers on either side, and with a huge preponderance on that of Prussia. She has made ready. She proposes to swamp her

enemies, to push them aside by her sheer weight, to deluge their armies. More; I venture this opinion. Bearing in mind Prussia's huge and overwhelming numbers, and the fact that the marching of those men to death proves that her soldiers will not be deterred by vast losses, I say that our commanders must retire and retire before them, leaving forts such as these to take care of themselves, holding every position of advantage, manning trenches and good cover always, and holding on to them as long as may be. Holding on and fighting always, making these Bosches suffer, and yet never letting them break the armies or fight a decisive battle. Thus will their losses in time tell upon them; while their lines of communication will be extended, their forces scattered along them for their defence, till their main armies will have dwindled. Then, sir, shall the Allies strike, we, the French, and the British, while Russian hordes pour into Germany and Austria, and, combining with the Servians, smash their way to Vienna and Berlin. There are some things, Monsieur le Capitaine, which may not be. The wicked plans of the Kaiser and his Germans shall not be accomplished."

Jim was in the firing line now, taking careful aim at that advancing host, firing and firing. Not that careful aim was required, seeing that he had a solid blue-grey wall to fire at. Now and again he dodged to the bottom of the trench as a German shell screeched its way towards them, and often

enough was the dusty ground all round spattered with bullets. A bleeding mark on his left hand showed where a ricochetting shot had struck him, though he was ignorant of the fact. There was no pain. Excitement robbed him of usual sensations. For the Bosches were pouring onward. Nothing could stop that blue-grey host. It swept on like a tide, its front curving and breaking, piling itself up here and there into heaps, heaps of ghastly, writhing bodies. A roar came from it now, a roar of fiendish anguish and hatred. It squirmed its way forward, ever forward, despite losses, advancing now at a run towards the trenches. Then it was brought up by the barbed-wire entanglements. At that distance the faces of the men could be seen, faces distraught with fear and fury, faces which spat venomous words at the Belgians while the men cut the wire entanglements. Then, with a hoarse roar of relief, the mass lurched forward, forward into the hail of lead still persistently poured into it. Suddenly the roar of guns ceased. Belgian and German artillerists had done their work. It was the hour for handgrips.

"Make ready!" The word was passed down the trenches, and Jim shook his rifle to make sure that the bayonet was fixed properly. "Forward, Belgium!"

What a roar the men set up, those little Belgian soldiers! They leaped from their trenches as one man, gripping their weapons. Then with bellows of hate they raced to meet the enemy. And they,

the shattered blue-grey mass, the highly-trained soldiers of the Kaiser, these gallant fellows who had braved so much to reach the spot they now occupied, they came to a halt, each man firing his rifle from the hip, hoping to mow down the advancing Belgians. That bounding mass of little infantry soldiers disconcerted the huge, beefy Teutons. A squeal of rage came from the ranks. Men shouted to encourage one another. Then, thud! the lines were engaged. Bayonets crossed bayonets. The charge of the Belgians carried them into the front ranks of the enemy.

"And so it was once before—last night, I think, though I have forgotten, Monsieur," said the officer, when the thing was over. "They came at us in masses. Our searchlights fell upon them. They reached the entanglements and crossed them. Then our boys charged, and the Bosches fled squealing. They cannot stand cold steel, Monsieur. It is an omen. Belgium may fall, must fall indeed. The Prussian host will at first be triumphant. And then—and then, Monsieur—they shall be driven back even as you have just witnessed."

It was terrific. Jim lay back and gasped for breath, for he had borne his share in the fighting. He could hardly believe that he had seen such things, could hardly appreciate the fact that he had taken part in such a horrible business. For horrible it all was. Even he, a soldier, must admit it. Look at those heaps of dead and wounded beyond the wire entanglement! Look

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"THOSE LITTLE BELGIAN SOLDIERS LEAPED FROM THEIR TRENCHES AS ONE MAN, GRIPPING THEIR WEAPONS"

at the silent figures stretched in or close to the trenches! He went back to his aeroplane sad at heart, but with a fixed determination. He could admire the Prussian courage, the fury of their reckless attack. He lauded to the skies the gallant opposition of the Belgians, an opposition utterly unexpected by the Germans, and of such far-reaching importance to the Allies. But was it all necessary? Of what benefit the ruthless slaughtering of so many men? Who was to gain by the horrible exhibition of human venom?

"Not the Kaiser. Not the Prussians. No one. Wait," he thought. "Perhaps in the dim distance one can distinguish some good result. If the Kaiser triumph, then good-bye to freedom. The world will be crushed and Germanized. But supposing he lose—and I'll wager my last breath on it—then good may come out of this terrible conflict. Men will be satiated with horrors. Prussian militarism will have been crushed, and the German people will have been crippled by their losses. A nation in arms thereafter will be impossible. All menace will have gone, and the future should be tranquil."

Jim registered a vow never to give in to the Germans.

CHAPTER IX

Maurice Mervin alias Guggenheimer

THERE was a sudden commotion in the city of Brussels on the main boulevard, a commotion which set men running.

"What's happened? Who is it? There were shots."

Men were shouting now. An angry roar came from the distance. Even Jim Fletcher's curiosity was whetted. For he too was in Brussels, having returned from Liége to the British army now assembled in France, and been sent out again to gather tidings. That very morning he had planed downward toward this beautiful Belgian city and had reported at headquarters. Now, accompanied by a staff officer, he was making his way to the officers' mess of the nearest infantry battalion, where luncheon awaited them.

"Bosches?" he asked his companion.

"Probably. Spies," came the short answer. "So it has been from the first outbreak of this war. Spies are everywhere."

"As in England," exclaimed Jim with some bitterness. "Even 'naturalized' Germans are not

above suspicion. They are in every port over our way, in every hotel, in a thousand households."

"And here, masquerading in Belgian uniforms, as officers of the regular army, as doctors, as gendarmes, even as nuns and nurses, spies who have lived for years among us and have carried on businesses," said the officer. "Now we are learning that those businesses have been instigated often enough by the Kaiser's Government; that the astute Teuton has come amongst us both to gather gold for himself and also as a means to obtaining every sort of information which those in Berlin might, with the mathematical and painstaking work for which they are famous, tabulate and index and prepare for this great war of their making. Bah! Their meanness disgusts me."

Those shouts still continued, and now a bellowing throng pressed toward them. But as yet no official was evident. The officer pushed his way forward.

"What is this?" he asked authoritatively.

"A spy! a spy!" the mob bellowed at him, half a dozen of those in the centre gripping the burly shoulders of a man dressed in the uniform of a gunner officer.

"A spy! Why is he suspected?"

"Why? He was denounced by a man with whom he happened to meet at the end of the boulevard. Where is the fellow?"

It was hard to follow what was said, seeing that a dozen or more excited individuals addressed the

officer at the same moment. Then one swept his comrades aside and disclosed a man who followed on the heels of the captors.

"This is the one who called to us to secure this ruffian," he shouted. "He it is who called him a spy. See, he is a Belgian. Speak, man. Tell the officer what you know of this rascal."

Jim looked and wondered. For some reason the appearance of this second man awoke some chord in his memory. Where had he seen the fellow before? Was it pure imagination? As to the man himself, this one who had denounced the spy, he stood calm and unmoved by the gesticulating mob about him. Even the fury of the spy escaped him. He was tall, exceedingly pale, almost sallow. A black moustache shadowed a mouth the shape of which was thereby rendered invisible. As to the eyes, they might have been blue or grey or brown. Tinted glasses hid them. This was certain. The fellow was possessed of a thin, beaky nose which stretched down like an aged crone's till it almost touched his chin, giving him a decidedly sinister appearance. But his calmness was the most pronounced thing about him. He stood unruffled before the officer and the crowd, unmindful of the ravings of the man he had denounced, detached from the scene as it were, almost bored by the noise and commotion.

"Speak," demanded the officer. "This man is a spy, you say?"

"He is."

"A lie! He lies!" shrieked the man accused, swinging a fist at his accuser. "He has a grudge against me. I am no German. He it is who is a spy."

"Silence!" The officer waved his hand impatiently. "All this you can tell the court," he said. "Perhaps there are others here who can speak for or against you."

"There are," came in quiet tones from the one who had given information, calm still, though that fist had barely escaped striking him. "See, Monsieur, go or send to Rue Lenoir, number 25, and there you will hear of Monsieur Hervey. This is he, or rather his assumed name. Then search his room."

The man accused as a spy glowered at him and foamed with rage. Suddenly gathering himself together he flung himself at the one who had spoken, and but for those who gripped him by the shoulders would have done him an injury. His face was livid with rage, his eyes protruding.

"Liar!" he bellowed. "You, who are the leader of spies, the head of the organization here and in England, you dare to denounce me when it is yourself who should be hanged or shot immediately! Monsieur," he cried, appealing to the officer, "do not listen to him. He has a private grudge against me."

"Silence! This is not the place in which to investigate such a matter. Bring him to the barracks."

The officer gave his orders coldly, and turned his back. As for the informant, he stood blinking through his tinted glasses, unmoved by the frantic words of the man he had denounced, unheeding the sinister glances of many. And Jim's amongst others were fixed upon him. Who was this silent, cold, unemotional man, this individual who spoke French with the idioms common to the Belgian, who looked as if he had never once smiled in all his life, and who might be honest man, rogue, anything, to judge by his unprepossessing appearance?

"Met him before, I'm sure," thought Jim. "But where? When? That's the worst of travelling a lot for the Secret Service."

No doubt his duties had had that disadvantage. Many and many a time had our hero been called upon to visit foreign countries, and, if the whole truth had been known, his investigations had led him to adopt a number of different poses. He had been before now a rich Englishman, with more money than brains, travelling to show his magnificence. He had been in a German racing establishment. Once he had impersonated a British commercial traveller. That had been in times of peace. In war time, now, nothing would have induced Jim Fletcher to adopt a mean disguise, or to undertake the duty of spying.

Somewhere, however, in his travels he had met a man ridiculously like this silent, unemotional man who had denounced a spy in the heart of Brussels. He stared at the fellow, and behind his

glasses the man blinked innocently, unheedingly, back at him. Then Jim knew.

"Wait!" he shouted of a sudden, swinging round, for the cavalcade was now making for the barracks, the Belgian officer and himself in advance, the prisoner, his accuser, and the crowd following. "Wait, Monsieur—this man who accuses. The fellow he has denounced may or may not be a spy; stating that his accuser is head of the spying organization in England and Belgium, he practically acknowledges that he is. But this other man: I know him. I have met him. Stop! Arrest the fellow."

In his mind's eye he now saw the actual scene when first he had come across Maurice Mervin. It was a year ago, perhaps, and the scene had vastly impressed him. It was strange, too, that the meeting had been connected with Gladys Fairleigh. He had met her at a garden party given by the officer commanding the troops in the Portsmouth district, and with her Professor Fairleigh. Yes, he had been attracted by the daughter and interested to some degree in the father. For he was a student of Germany, a Germanophile, one who thought nothing but good of the Fatherland.

"What! War possible!" he had chirruped, learning that Jim knew the language and the country, and hearing him assert that the position between the nations, Germany and Britain, was not too cordial. "Bosh, sir! Your pardon. Your pardon, I beg."

He was one of those courtly old gentlemen who would not have spoken an offensive word under any circumstances. But this German question had become a mania with him. He had cultivated the friendship of Germans. He had sent his daughter to Germany to earn her living, and but for the fact that she was enjoying a holiday at home Jim would not have met her.

"War, sir, is impossible between the nations. I say it who know. Prussia strives only for advancement with peace. You shall be convinced. Come to tea to-morrow and you shall meet one who will take no denial."

Jim had gone, and had encountered an individual at once interesting to a student of human nature, secretive, sinister, and cold, a man who stamped an uncertain personality upon him. It was the very man who had just now denounced a spy. But wait! That one at Portsmouth was lame, and thereby rendered rather short of stature. Jim could see him now as he entered the Professor's sunny garden.

"Mr. Maurice Mervin, who lives with us," the latter had said. "Captain Fletcher."

The two men stared at one another—the one, the British soldier, with frank, open eyes as yet not in the least enquiring; the stranger from behind tinted glasses. Jim had heard that the Professor was somewhat impecunious, and added to his means by accepting a lodger. There was no harm in that, to be sure, but—such a lodger!

"Good day!" he said, a little coldly for the genial Jim. But he never did take rapidly to men whose faces were hidden behind tinted masks, whose features were neither frank nor wholly discernible.

"Glad to meet you, Captain Fletcher." The man spoke coldly, without enthusiasm, yet politely. Also, he used the most polished English. "Magnificent weather we are having."

"Magnificent. I—you—like Portsmouth?"

The ferrety eyes behind the tinted glasses suddenly shot out an inquisitive glance. The man looked a little startled—or would have done so, had not his glasses masked everything. But the answering voice was cool, calm, well-modulated.

"Immensely. And you? You are in the army?"

"Yes."

"What service, may one enquire?"

"Regular service."

"Precisely. That is obvious. But what branch, sir? I am interested in all things military and naval. Indeed, had it not been for my lameness I myself would have been a soldier."

There was a grim smile on those lips hidden beneath the drooping moustache. Jim guessed that it was there. He didn't like this fellow.

"What branch? Oh, flying service," he answered a little curtly. Then, as happens sometimes with men who meet and intuitively dislike one another, or have reason to have mutual distrust, they exchanged cigarettes and parted, each wondering about the other.

Jim did more. He made a few subtle enquiries of the Professor and his daughter, and when next in London looked in other directions. As a result he learned that Gustave Guggenheimer was a naturalized German, who had changed his name for that of Maurice Mervin, and had business which took him at times to the continent of Europe.

"One of the usual spies," he thought. "One of the men whom Germany has sent to England, there to bribe honest men to part with secrets, to tempt the poor worker to become a traitor, and to worm information at any price for the silent government of Germany. Well, they're mostly known to our detectives. I'll see that Maurice Mervin's name joins the list."

Jim at once took the necessary steps, and had since then made enquiries of the officials. But he learned nothing, and though detectives had watched Maurice Mervin they had gathered nothing of a suspicious nature. Yet he was a spy, a crafty, subtle spy, the head of a vast organization covering Britain and Belgium. Maurice Mervin, the man with the inscrutable face, whose thoughts no one could read because of his tinted glasses, the sinister-looking individual of uncertain age and restless activity, was ever busy in securing facts considered of importance by his government. Let us explain, too, that Maurice Mervin in Professor Fairleigh's house and the same man outside that humble if comfortable and homely establishment were suspiciously dissimilar individuals. No one would

have suspected that a short, painfully lame man, who was wont to support his weight on a stick and hobble about the streets, was the alert, tall, active fellow who strode here and there. Nor were the faces similar. Sometimes the active man wore no tinted glasses. Then he was disguised by a patch over one ferrety eye. At other times a slouch hat made recognition almost impossible. If further change were required, a false beard, cunningly applied, made a vast alteration. Of a surety the man was a spy.

Jim swung round as the memory of the rascal flashed across his mind. The fellow he had denounced was quite possibly one of the same kidney, and that being so, it was hard to discern why this Maurice Mervin should have denounced him. But Jim did not know the depth of the rascal's duplicity and cunning. The days were to come when he would learn more about him; when he was to gather that Gustave Guggenheimer, now decked with the English name of Maurice Mervin, was an arch-scoundrel, one who was prepared to buy a traitor at any moment, and sell a comrade the next if it but suited his purpose. Here was a case in point. The wretch denounced, one in the chief spy's service, had displeased him in some way. The easiest way to remove him was to hand him over to the Belgian authorities. It was callous and cruel even amongst scoundrels, but it happened to be Maurice Mervin's way.

"Stop!" called Jim, swinging round. "This

man who has denounced the spy—let me look at him again. I know him."

Lame or not, it made no difference, and Jim Fletcher was not such a child that he could not realize that Maurice Mervin was clever enough to act such a part with ease and security. It made no difference to his decision. He knew the fellow, and would in his turn denounce him.

"Push him forward," he called. "Let me have a close look at him. I think, mon officier, that this fellow must be arrested with his comrade."

The man under arrest beamed on Jim Fletcher and chortled. In an instant his flaming wrath was appeased and almost forgotten. For here was revenge indeed. The comrade who had proved such a traitor was about to meet with his deserts. The crowd, too, enjoyed the situation immensely. Spies in those days were everywhere. They were being captured every day, sometimes many of them, and in numerous disguises. In many a barracks courts-martial had sat, and thereafter firing squads had dealt summary punishment to the offenders. Well, two at a time was a good haul.

"Another spy!" they shouted. "Push him forward. Let the English officer identify him."

But the man had gone. As the throng bustled along he had managed to get a little into the background. Then, as Jim stopped and thereby threw the group into confusion, Maurice Mervin had dived into an open door and had run for safety. Though men hunted high and low, and others

raced through that part of the city, no trace was found of him. He had gone. There was nothing left for the mob and the officer but to take their solitary prisoner to the barracks, and send to the Rue Lenoir to verify the truth of the other rascal's statement.

We have already said sufficient to prove that Maurice Mervin was an unscrupulous rascal. Let us then give the full tale of his iniquities. They concerned mainly the house of Professor Fairleigh. The business of spying, thorough though it was, was never too absorbing to prevent this man's interest following other directions. He was a cunning and crafty knave, and one, moreover, bent on improving his own position. It followed, therefore, that his subtle and unscrupulous mind had discovered a means whereby he might in the fullness of time become quite rich and prosperous. Could the few who knew him have seen him in his private room at the Professor's, they might have learned something that would have filled them with wonder and horror. For this was what Maurice Mervin had unravelled, and it concerned Gladys Fairleigh.

"Almost an heiress," the man told himself as he pored over certain notes and documents he kept locked in a safe. "Let me look through the facts again. Her uncle, old Thomas Fairleigh, is as much a crazy crank as the Professor. But his craziness hasn't taken the form of helping Germany. It has severed him from his family and

made almost a hermit of him. He lives in some lonely part in Scotland, and—and he's rich. He's rich because he inherited under his wife's will, and their son will succeed—will succeed, of course, if he lives to do so. He's in the army, and—well, that's promising. Now, if the old man dies—and old men do die often enough—and the son happens to have departed this life also, the will—here's a copy of it—the will says distinctly that Gladys Fairleigh shall inherit."

Often had he sketched out the same position. Often had he lighted a cigarette when buried in that room of his, and made subtle plans for the future. One of these, too, he had quickly carried out.

"First secure the girl," he had told himself. "Well, that should be easy. The Professor is a crazy fool who will jump at the opportunity of sending her to Berlin. I have agents there who can find a place for her. She shall go now. Then —then, when the day of days comes, she will be secure and out of England."

Thus it had happened that Gladys went to Germany. And, strangely enough, Jim had been the means of thwarting this part of the spy's carefully-made plans. Now it seemed that he had again stumbled up against him. Not that he knew or even suspected the depth of the ruffian's cunning; while Maurice Mervin was not yet aware of the adventurous journey Gladys had made to England. But the man was filled with resource.

Doubtless he would soon learn what had happened. In the meanwhile he was gone, and since that was the case Jim could do nothing more in the matter. He lunched with the Belgian officer, and later that day returned to the British force then advancing northward. There were strenuous times ahead. In a little while, in a matter of a few days, the biggest battle in the world's history would be joined—a battle stretching over a front of some 200 miles or more, one with perhaps two million men engaged in it on either side. It was to be stupendous. The world waited for its onset with anxiety and trembling.

CHAPTER X

Four Weeks of War

How may one adequately describe those first few weeks of the world-war, the Armageddon so often and so persistently prophesied, the universal call to arms pooh-poohed by so many, foreseen with fear and trembling by hundreds and thousands of patriots, sneered at by others, none the less patriots but with minds warped by their own particular political views? Now that it had come, and those first days of tenseness, of calm yet deep concern were gone, how Old England wished that she had listened to the counsels of those wise patriots who had raised their voices in days of peace, and bearing ridicule, scorn, often the most virulent abuse, had clamoured for a bigger army, for a nation in arms, for a Britain as well prepared on land as she was undoubtedly at sea! But it was no use repining, no use flinging names at political folly. Soldiers were wanted in those days, soldiers who cannot be created in an hour, a week —nay, even in months. For this was to be no guerrilla war, but a titanic conflict between trained troops; and to meet Germany's trained men first-

class troops were undoubtedly required. To send recruits before them would be merely butchery.

Thus the first few weeks of the war found Britain calm, resourceful, determined, with her sons from over every sea arming and making ready to join her. It found fevered recruiting for the army in full swing, with Kitchener of Khartoum—a name to conjure with, to make young men thrill and older soldiers thank their stars that he was hale and hearty—with Earl Kitchener at the head of the War Office. The whole country had become a camping-ground, for the Territorials had answered the country's call to a man, and were busily preparing. There were camps, too, for German prisoners, for German suspects, while Germans and Austrians within the kingdom were required to register themselves and report at frequent intervals to the police. Railways were guarded, and special constables sworn in, for many a "bobby" was already fighting for his country, a great number being old soldiers. Let it be stated, too, that there was abundant evidence that police were wanted, for dastardly attempts were made to damage important bridges, and there was proof of the presence of numerous skulking spies, some still possessed of carrier pigeons.

Add to the above another proof of the wise preparedness of the British Government in all things save the provision of a mighty army. Schemes were already prepared to secure commerce, to safeguard banks and money, to offer State insurance to

ships, and to provide committees throughout the land to watch industries and unemployment. In this connection the Prince of Wales called for subscriptions from great and small, and plans were made to provide work with some of this money, to make useful employment for those thrown out of work by the war, and also to assist the dependents of soldiers and sailors where the Government allowance was not sufficient.

Thus, ashore, in the old country, thanks to these wise provisions, the onset of war found a calm and confident people. In the Colonies it discovered a younger Britain just as ready for the fray, all shoulder to shoulder.

Afloat, there was an uncanny, mysterious silence. But this quickly emerged from those first few weeks of war: the British Navy might have disappeared from view; but so also had the ships of the enemy. Trade routes were almost clear. A few German cruisers still kept the sea, but were already almost cornered. The *Breslau* and the *Goeben*, two which had infested the Mediterranean, and with heroic bravery had bombarded undefended Moroccan towns, fled to the Dardanelles, and were interned there rather than fight the British and French ships waiting outside for them. For the rest, a host of German trading vessels were captured, her overseas commerce put a summary stop to, and more than one of her privateering cruisers sunk. That mine-ship, too, which Jim and Dicky had seen off Heligoland, was discovered in the very act of sowing

mines broadcast in the open sea—a horrible and most reprehensible act—and had been sent to the bottom. Nor was she the only one so employed. Indeed, just as Germany had shown herself careless of treaties ashore, forgetful of her plighted word, so, afloat, she was observing by their gross breach all the recognized rules of war. Trawlers in the guise of neutrals sailed the North Sea and sowed mines within even a few miles of England. As a result, those first few weeks saw trawlers, minesweepers, and merchant ships of neutral nations sunk at sea, and amongst them at least one naval vessel, the *Amphion*. Such events were only to be expected, and though Germany's dastardly act was deeply resented, it made no difference to the determination of this country. Indeed, as the days passed, Great Britain had every reason for feeling confidence in Admiral Jellicoe and the gallant tars in charge of the King's Navy.

Let us return to Belgium and France, where those mighty hosts were already disposed for battle, and where General Joffre, the French commander, had charge of affairs. No more popular or respected leader could have been chosen for the British Expeditionary Force than Field-Marshal Sir John French, that dashing leader of cavalry who had returned from the Boer war with laurels of the highest. His lightning visit to Paris in the first days of the war, there to confer with the President and others, was a veritable triumph. It showed the French, if they needed further demonstration

after the sight which Boulogne had presented, that Britain would stand by them firmly, and cemented the *entente* first laid down by the genial Edward VII. Thereafter General French and his army disappeared behind a screen, just as our navy had done, and just as had been the case with the French forces. It was known that the latter were in force in Alsace and Lorraine, the provinces stolen by the Germans in 1870, and that minor successes had been achieved. It was learned, too, that the Allies were hastening to support the hard-pressed Belgians. But their exact disposition was uncertain, for no war correspondents were allowed with the troops, and but the merest and most superficial reports were issued by the Government.

But from Belgium came news in abundance. The Kaiser's hordes had swamped the country. His Uhlans, ever a bold corps of light horsemen, had penetrated in all directions, while fire and sword were being carried through the till then peaceful and smiling country. Merciless, indeed, were the Germans. Evidence accumulated as the days went by of their gross breach of international laws of war. They slaughtered men, women, and children in their rage at the losses they had suffered at Liége, and far and wide they set out to convince the Belgians and their Allies that the Kaiser and his hosts were terrible and unsparing. Those first few weeks brought news of the occupation of Liége itself, and of the arrival of the German siege guns. Their coming was followed by the fall of certain of

the forts, and by the subsequent fall of those at Namur, considered to be impregnable. But then, those who had ventured that opinion had done so in the belief that the forts were properly manned and armed. They were neither. The Belgians were, indeed, too few, though wonderfully plucky; while the guns, ordered long ago from the Prussian firm of Krupps, had been repeatedly delayed —another fact amongst the now accumulating mass of evidence which went to prove that the Kaiser and his War Council had deliberately planned this awful war. Also the new German siege guns were stupendous.

Thereafter, what remained of the Belgian forces retired to Antwerp, while Brussels was occupied by the Germans. The country on every side was wasted, and villages and towns fired. At Louvain, the seat of Belgian universities, a city much like our Oxford or Cambridge, the Prussian hosts executed a deed as terrible as ever committed by Attila and his barbarian Huns. They burned and destroyed the city, slaughtered civilians on every side, and committed nameless atrocities. Thus the Bosches gained the name of "modern Huns", and laid up for themselves and their own people sure promise of reprisal when the tide turned.

But it was to Eastern Prussia and Galicia, and to the armies of the Allies out of Belgium, that the eyes of the world turned. It was there, in those widely divergent parts, that millions of men now warred for a stake that was beyond comprehension.

For the fortunes of the Allies and of the Russian hosts alike, though separated by hundreds of miles, were inseparably bound together. Give Russia time, and she could roll her millions into Austria-Hungary and Prussia. Give the Kaiser what he looked for, and he would defeat the allied French and British by the sheer weight of his vastly preponderating numbers and because of his readiness for this war; and once he had shattered them, would turn and rend the Russians. Rapidity of action, a furious advance on the part of the Prussians then traversing Belgium, and a smashing defeat of the Allies were all in the plan of the operations. Well, there had been delay at first. The pestilential yet wonderfully plucky Belgians had held the German hosts. Now it was the turn of the Allies. The world has learned how that huge mass of men was handled—how a masterly retreat was ordered. A smooth, well-ordered, but necessarily rapid retreat was undertaken from the Belgian frontier right back to a line stretching between Paris and Verdun, till the allied lines were concentrated over a smaller and therefore more workable front, and until the German lines of communication had been vastly extended. Truly it was a splendid performance, the Allies fighting and retiring all the way, losing heavily at times, yet never broken, causing terrible losses to the German troops. Every inch of a hundred and more miles was contested, every yard had its German dead.

Look at one result of this retirement. It had

occupied time. Days had slipped by, days valuable to Russia, of vital importance to Germany. It ended abruptly on a line drawn east and west through Paris. There the Allies stood and commenced an offensive move. It was the turning of the tide. A masterly and strategical retreat had accomplished its purpose.

For Russian hordes had invaded Eastern Prussia and defeated the German army there. In Galicia a terrible battle had been fought with the Austrians, ending in the shattering of a huge force, in the capture of Lemberg and of huge numbers of prisoners. Indeed, it almost ended in the dispersal of all Austrian opposition, though there was still one army near Lublin to be dealt with—already sorely tried. Elsewhere the Servians, that gallant people who were to have been punished, had utterly defeated the punitive force sent against them, and were even then advancing into the country of the enemy.

Thus that masterly retreat had given time to Russia to achieve victories, and had seen the partial annihilation of the Austro-Hungarian forces. Germany had relied on them, and now had but a weak ally to look to. But, worse than all, perhaps, though the onrush of the Russians was bad enough, was the fact that the Kaiser's forces in France had not yet been victorious. The allied host was before them, eager for the battle, and it was yet to be seen who was to be victorious. It may be said, in fact, that not until this moment, when Germany's ally was already almost broken,

did Kaiser Wilhelm, the man responsible for this war, the ruthless King of barbarians and women murderers, find himself able even seriously to attempt a crushing defeat of his elusive enemies. You cannot smash a force which continually retires, unless you drive it at length into a corner. You may follow; you will certainly lose heavily in proportion, seeing that you are ever the attacker, and you will inevitably weaken your forces. Wounds and death deplete the ranks. The lines of communication need attention. And then, when you least expect it, the elusive, ever-retiring enemy may elect to stand on a ground carefully prepared beforehand. That is war. General Joffre had carried out a strategic retreat—a retreat during which the Kaiser had thrown hordes of his best troops against the British and had yet failed to break them. Indeed, he had learned what in his secret heart of hearts he had known from the beginning, what his English blood should have warned him of—he had learned that the British troops man for man were better than his Germans, that they were brave to a point, unbeaten, ready, nay, longing to take the offensive.

Lastly, before returning to Jim Fletcher, let us but venture this opinion. In those early weeks of this awful war there were some who hugged themselves, saying, "Thank heaven, we have a navy! Nothing else matters." Others, wiser and more far-sighted, we venture to suggest, knew that both army and navy were of importance. For with

France shattered, our expeditionary force gone, and the Russians, even, beaten, there would remain Britain alone and her fleet—Britain of those three nations alone standing between Germany and her world-wide ambition.

Was it credible that Germany under such circumstances would stand content? Later, when she had recuperated and built a bigger fleet, she would descend on Britain as surely as night follows the day, when the conflict would be continued. No. Our gallant tars might hold the seas and sink the Prussian navy if it ever ventured from its ports. They might utterly crush the Kaiser's budding strength afloat and yet leave Prussia immensely strong, capable of continuing the conflict. It was ashore that the real issue lay. It was there that Prussian militarism must be crushed out of being. It was well, then, that at this juncture Great Britain, France, and Russia published a new treaty. They were allies now. There was no longer a mere *entente*. They pledged themselves one and all to make peace only together and to see this war through to a finish.

Thus the first month of war found at its close a stricken Belgium, a despot as yet foiled of his hopes, and the Allies firmly knit together. It brought Japan into the field also, she having, according to her treaty with Great Britain, declared war against Germany in the East. Also it saw German Togoland secured by one of our Colonial forces, and the German Samoan islands captured

by an expedition sent out from New Zealand. The first month may be said, indeed, to have passed very well for the Allies. Throughout the length and breadth of King George's dominions it discovered feverish patriotism, so much so that three hundred thousand recruits were secured in a bare four weeks. British-like, we had come into the conflict at the eleventh hour, and then reluctantly. Only that feeling that, whatever befell, our honour must never be smirched had caused us to challenge the Germans. It meant terrible losses in men and treasure; it would inevitably result in dislocation of trade, in misery and wretchedness for many poor people. But the die was cast. Life without honour, even for nations, is not worth living; and the British nation throughout the world, together with their comrades of the Indian Empire, endorsed the decision of their Ministers with whole-hearted enthusiasm, counting well the cost, and methodically, promptly, and with that sureness for which we are famous, set their hand to the plough, and made ready to fight this fight against the German autocrat to an absolute and final finish.

Thus, having set our house in order as it were, and placed before the reader but a brief and, we fear, none too elaborate survey of the situation, we return to Jim Fletcher, then doing good service for the Allies in face of the Germans.

CHAPTER XI

A Taste of British Fighting

"It's just a ding-dong battle, sir, and I've to report that the enemy are massing huge forces in front of our lines—huge forces."

"Hum!" The Brigadier continued to smoke reflectively, shooting jets of vapour through his fine, aristocratic-looking nostrils. "Huge forces. Hum!"

He took the cigarette from his lips and inspected it closely, read the name of the manufacturing firm printed in the daintiest of dainty lettering, and scrutinized the gilt coat-of-arms below. Then he frowned. Had the printing or the aroma of the cigarette displeased him—which? No one could say; but, in any case, it seemed to be the cigarette that claimed all his attention. Yet Jim knew his man.

"Yes, sir," he repeated. "Huge forces. I was well over them, and, so as to make quite sure, descended till they peppered me. The aeroplane is riddled."

Very slowly the Brigadier drew an order-book from his pocket and pencilled a line across one of

the white sheets. He was still smoking reflectively, and seemed to be taking far more notice of the puffs of smoke than he did of Jim or of the note-book, or, for the matter of that, of the other puffs of smoke to be seen on every hand. For the battle was a ding-dong affair, as Jim had asserted. None could say so with better assurance than he, for he had, as he stated, but just recently been flying over the battlefield. Rather, we should say, he had been soaring over that portion in which the British Expeditionary Force was engaged; and that was but a matter of a few miles in length, a mere stretch of country compared with the whole long line of the battle. For some three million men were engaged, the Germans in full strength, thrusting and driving forward; the Allies slowly, steadily, courageously retreating, retiring with method, unbroken, presenting always a strong front to the enemy. And Britain was represented in that long line by a force of some seventy-five thousand heroes, who held the left flank of the Allies.

"Hum! Huge forces, eh, Captain Fletcher? Be good enough to mark their disposition in on this line. Ah! Thank you! I think I can now follow the movement. Germany seems to have made up her mind to deal our men a swinging blow."

"They say it's the work of the Kaiser, sir," came the airman's answer. "His aeroplanes have given him our position, and he is doing his best to shatter

us and so punish Britain for coming into the conflict. Wish I could see how our boys fight. I mean, wish I were with them in the trenches."

"Then go. But mind, we cannot afford to lose good officers heedlessly. Take care."

The Brigadier smiled at Jim and nodded his assent. He liked this keen young officer, this clean-built, active, and alert flight commander. Also, he had found him of wonderful assistance, for not only did he bring information from up aloft, but he could also interpret. It would do him good to have a change of scene; though, for the matter of that, there had been nothing but change of scene for the Allies. Indeed, ever since they had taken up position at or about Mons they had been marching, marching rearward and fighting, snatching a meal when they could, sleeping for a few minutes, then marching to a new position, and there perhaps dividing the hour or so they stayed between sleeping and fighting. Still, Jim was a glutton for movement.

"Thanks, sir!" he said, saluting. Then he turned away to where he had descended with his aeroplane, and satisfied himself that it was already secured aboard the lorry to which it was appointed. It was at that precise moment that a motor omnibus hove in sight, one of the fleet once plying the London streets for the General Omnibus Company. No doubt, too, the driver had steered it there over many a mile. Now he was decked in khaki, armed with a revolver, and looked the

soldier all over. Jim stopped him as the bus thundered along the road.

"Going forward?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. Ammunition. I'm fully loaded."

The chassis was groaning beneath the weight of a mass of ammunition boxes and bumped heavily over the road. Jim peeped in, and then leapt up beside the driver.

"I'll get you to give me a lift," he smiled. "No tickets wanted?"

"Not this side, sir. Yes, sir—tickets for Berlin," the fellow grinned, jerking his head over his shoulder. "I've been busy a-chalkin' out the old labels, 'Amstead and Bank and Charing Cross and so on, and puttin' 'To Berlin' instead, and you should ha' seen some of them German prisoners we took yesterday. They was shoved in this bus along with their escort. And it wasn't long afore they spotted my chalk-marks. They was furious. Then Tony Smith—leastwise, beggin' pardon, sir—Corporal Smith, that is—'e says, ''Ere, what's wrong with you, matey? Ain't that notice good enough? Ain't we on the way to Berlin as sure as anything? Ho!' 'e says, seein' the German gettin' as red as a turkey, 'ho, my boy, I've got orders to keep you sound and see that you don't do no mischief; but I ain't got no orders to stand lip from no one, I 'aven't. You just stop that mutterin' and cussin'.'

"You see, sir," explained the jovial driver, "that German chap could speak English as well

as you or me. 'E'd been one of them toffs of waiters in one of the swagger hotels in London, and 'e'd been drawin' more in a week than me and my mates could make by honest work in a month o' Sundays. 'E understood them labels and what Tony—beg pardon—Corporal Smith 'ad to say, and he'd got to sayin' nasty sorter things under 'is breath.

"'"'Ere, you stow it,' says the corporal. 'Ain't Berlin good enough fer you? If you stays in this here bus sufficiently long you'll get there right enough, Kaiser or no Kaiser. So stow yer lip, and quit scowling.'"

The man went on garrulously as they bowled along the road. Indeed, he might have been driving London buses laden with ammunition all his life, and under similar conditions. He didn't give a button for flying shells. And when bullets pattered against the woodwork of the bus, punching neat little round holes, neater than you could manage to make with a gimlet, he merely screwed mouth and eyes round, winked at this officer—a heinous act perhaps in the ordinary, fully-trained "Tommy", but to be forgiven in one such as he—and went on driving placidly.

They were near the firing-line now, and Jim found every reason for thinking that he had been right when he declared the battle to be a ding-dong affair. For there was a long, almost sustained rattle denoting heavy rifle-fire. It ebbed and flowed along the British line, subsiding now and again, and then spluttering forth once more

into angry activity. Sometimes, too, a quick-firer would join in with its nasty, snappy bark, drowning the rat-a-tat-tat of the rifles, and being drowned in turn itself. But neither rifles nor quick-firers were to be compared in the din they made to the guns pumping shell at our gallant fellows, and those, now left behind the bus, which responded with good British iron and lead. The detonations were frequent and terrific. The air seemed to be stirred into a constant scream; while everywhere, now in front, now to one side, once immediately before the bus, big puffs of white smoke suddenly blew out, and from their midst appeared yellowish rays, bursting swiftly outwards. Then followed a terrific roar, a spluttering sweep of particles of iron and lead—and silence—silence for one brief instant. This was broken by rifle reports most likely, or by the swift rattle of death-dealing machine-guns; perhaps by another shell which pumped and wormed its way into the brown soil and then sent a cascade of earth flying in all directions.

"Jest an inferno. Yes, sir," grinned the driver. Jim smiled. He was thinking of those trenches at Liége and wondering where our men were. For as yet they were invisible. Somewhere in front they must be hiding in their trenches, just as still farther off the Germans must be waiting for their guns to work their very worst on the British before advancing.

Now the driver suddenly pulled up.

"Bank, sir!" he grinned, as if this were one of his usual halting-places in the city of London. "Bank, sir! All change! There's the ammunition guard a-waitin' fer me, and don't they use up some lead on them German cusses! Not 'arf!"

He took a cigarette from his pocket, looked mildly surprised and certainly amused as a blast of air took his cap from his head, and then calmly proceeded to light his cigarette, careless of the fact that a German shell had come with a thud against a soft patch of ground immediately to his right and had there exploded with terrific violence.

"It's like them dirty sausage-eatin' fellers," he grumbled, sucking at his "fag". "Instead o' greetin' a feller when he comes along with his bus, and a-passin' the time o' day friendly like, they goes and flings marbles at me."

"Marbles!" laughed Jim, picking himself up, for the terrific concussion and blast of air catching him as he was half-way between the step of the omnibus and the ground had flung him full length. "Big, noisy marbles, driver."

"You gets used to 'em," came the pleasant answer; "same as do these boys here a-waitin' fer me. 'Sides, sir, ain't I seen you aloft there gettin' peppered? Oh, yus. Aven't I just!"

He turned his eyes aloft and pointed at a German Taube aeroplane scooping high above them. Then he shook his fist, for something trailed from the glistening yellow thing, something which left a

streak of black smoke as it descended. Jim too had seen that signal and knew what it meant, though the garrulous driver must needs tell him. "As sure as eggs," he said with disgust, still shaking a fist at the Taube floating high above them; "as sure as eggs when I comes along with me old bus one of them chaps comes sailin' over and gives that signal. Then the band plays. Oh, yus, the band plays, not 'arf!"

That seemed to be a favourite expression of his; and Jim had the distinct feeling that this gallant and nonchalant fellow, who, no doubt, had never in his life before experienced what it is to be in a battle, save, of course, for the experiences he had had since he came over to France with the Expeditionary Force, would be decidedly disappointed if what he forecasted did not come about. He waited as the fatigue party began to unload the ammunition cases, and watched the driver grin and smoke more furiously than ever while he winked — yes, actually winked at the officer to whom he had given a lift.

"'Ark, sir!" he called. "You can 'ear them dirty blokes at it. Now fer the band!"

All this time there had been the incessant rattle of rifle-fire and the crash of guns behind and in front of them. There had also been terrific detonations as the enemy's shells dropped or exploded some distance in front of the point where Jim was standing. But now, from behind a knoll away to the left, above which could be seen the

green of a mass of trees, there came an almost continuous roar, punctuated by sharp detonations and by something else, something which gave one the impression that the air in that quarter was being shattered and beaten. The sky was filled with invisible, screaming bodies, shrieking their way towards that London bus. Then came that inferno which this casual fellow of a driver, this amateur though gallant and nonchalant soldier, was good enough to describe as "jest a bit o' band-playin', sir."

Common shell struck the road to front and rear. One buried itself two yards deep in the soft ground to one side of the bus, and, exploding, sent a hail of earth and stones into the vehicle, shattering what was left of the windows. It also blew the driver's cigarette from his hand, sending the fellow chasing after it. And thanks to that, no doubt, his life was saved for a shrapnel, beautifully fused, burst just in front and above the huge conveyance and spattered all around with bullets. Indeed, there came a sharp cry from one of the escort, while Jim himself was conscious of a twinge of pain. One of the bullets had struck the calf of his left leg and had torn his leather gaiter. As for the driver, he was standing shaking his fist furiously at the aeroplane still circling above.

"That's what they did afòre," he shouted. "Look at my bus. They've riddled the roof till there ain't a spot through which the rain won't come. Last night there wasn't more'n a corner

I could find where the wet didn't get me. Now there ain't that. See if I don't get even with them sausage-eatin' villains."

There was no mistake about the effect of that little bombardment. The bus, bereft of its seats and top before leaving England, and presenting a neat little roof, already bore traces of severe handling. There were holes in the bonnet. Every window had been shattered, while the boards forming the roof were bored in innumerable places. No doubt it was disgusting for the driver. For Jim and the others it was an illustration of German artillery work, work of the finest, and likely to make conditions for the British force exceedingly trying. Indeed, as he advanced Jim found even more reason for marvelling at the behaviour of our troops. It was one thing, he found, to be up there aloft, soaring this way and that, observing the battle below, picking out masses of the enemy, and seeking for movements of reserves or reinforcements. It had its excitement — plenty of it, to be sure, and an abundance of adventures, of bullets, and of hair-breadth escapes. But there was not there the pounding, nagging, nerve-shattering bang and crash of those shells. If they came aloft, more often than not they burst beneath him. Now, as he smiled a good-bye and good luck to the gallant bus driver and went on to the British trenches, Jim found himself astounded at what he saw.

"Hot work," he said, stretching himself beside a subaltern crouching in a shallow trench. The

young officer was smoking, and turned, smiling, to him.

"Rather!" he laughed. "But our turn's coming. We've been back here half an hour, and they're now signalling the boys over there to retire on us. Then there'll be a bust up. In big force, ain't they, these Germans?"

"Huge," Jim told him. Indeed, it had now become common property amongst the officers of the various staffs that five army corps were opposed to the small British force, a force operating on the extreme left of the allied line, and therefore in the most critical position. It was becoming clear, too, that the German objective was this vulnerable left wing. The Kaiser was determined to smash it; and knowing how few our men were, and realizing that if he could but roll us up and defeat us, the very fall of the British force would be a shattering blow to the Allies, putting aside the damage to British prestige, he sent a mighty force marching down upon our lines, while brigades of cavalry swung wide on his right so as to make the enveloping movement all the more complete. Bear in mind, too, that superior forces, the swift advance of the Germans, and General Joffre's plans all made it expedient for the allied line to retire, and retire swiftly; that this retiring movement was not the event of an hour or so, but of every day and night since the two armies had been in contact, and that our men had hardly rested or slept since they had detrained and marched to their positions.

Above all, recollect that the German host numbered in this part of the field quite three hundred thousand—a good four soldiers to every one of ours. Thus one can realize that Jim Fletcher found himself immersed in a scene of surpassing excitement.

Men lay to right and left of him, stretched in their hastily-dug, shallow trenches—men who joked and laughed. Others slept, their rifles lying beside them, while some smoked unconcernedly or ate their rations. And all the while shells flopped and thudded about them. Puffs of smoke filled the sky, and a veritable hail of shrapnel bullets swept the earth on every hand. The subaltern offered Jim a cigarette, took one himself, and swore softly beneath his breath. He was a youngster, perhaps nineteen years of age, and his face was as yet hairless. Yet he had the same coolness and nonchalance as those fine fellows under his immediate command.

"Just wait a bit," he said grimly, "and the boys here'll have their turn. That rotten Kaiser isn't goin' to have it all his own way. He's peppered us—or rather his guns have—ever since we took up this covering position. But the rearguards are being drawn in, and then there'll be a mess. I say, you're one of the Flying Corps. What's your impression?"

"Critical position, but not too critical for British soldiers," Jim told him curtly. "We've a huge force to keep off, and they're trying to envelop us. I'm longing to see you fellows get your turn. Then

I'll make off to the left. Our cavalry is there, and they, too, will be worth watching."

Perhaps it was half an hour later when men in front, who had been almost completely hidden till that moment, came marching steadily back. They crossed the trench in which Jim was sheltering, and went on still for quite a distance. Just beyond the brow of a rise they halted, and, no doubt, there commenced to entrench themselves. Meanwhile their retirement had been followed by a glimpse of the enemy's infantry. Blue-grey masses came into view in the distance, while guns, till then turned upon the men who had just retired, were directed on those now forming the rearguard. A storm of shell came crashing toward the trenches, causing sleepers to awake and all to cower. Men lay as flat as possible, and made ready for the coming encounter. Then behind them there burst forth an answering roar, the roar of the big field batteries which accompanied our army.

"That'll fetch 'em," the subaltern grinned, kneeling up and adjusting his binoculars. "Take a look. George! don't those shells split 'em!"

The effect of the firing on the Germans was indeed terrific, tremendous. As Jim gazed through the borrowed glasses and fixed them upon the massed enemy he saw shells explode just above them, immediately in front, or actually in the midst of the masses. The effect was almost beyond comprehension. It was terrifying. He could see the poor wretches hesitate and halt. He watched the

fronts of the brigades wavering. And then, in rear of the battalions, he caught sight of officers waving sword and revolver, shouting at their men, menacing those who showed timidity, driving the host forward. A host it was, too—some two hundred and fifty thousand infantry perhaps, with guns and cavalry supporting, all launched at the diminutive British force. It was a host that would take no denying, a veritable steam-roller which came on and on, though shaken by that awful shell-fire. Then a whistle sounded.

"Our time's coming, boys," the subaltern shouted, and Jim noticed that his youthful face was flushed and set. "Sight 'em at eight hundred. Wait till you hear my whistle."

Something struck the ground immediately behind them and burst with terrifying violence. Jim looked round, and then doubled up to escape the cascade of earth then descending. He leaned towards the subaltern and pulled his sleeve.

"About seven hundred yards, I think," he ventured. But there came no answer. The lad lay with his limbs splayed out helplessly, his face driven into the earth. Jim rolled him over gently and brushed his face clear of the earth. The eyelids were twitching, and so also the lips. Then the eyes opened wide and looked appealingly at Jim.

"Come nearer. Come nearer," he heard amidst the hum of bullets and the crash of distant shell. "They're coming, eh?"

"Yes," Jim told him gently.

"And we'll stand up to 'em? Never flinch? I——"

Suddenly the gallant fellow recollected his command and rolled himself over. With a superhuman effort he raised himself on knees and elbows and stared at the advancing enemy. Then he threw his head back desperately.

"Boys," he shouted, and at the call the men on either side sat up and cheered him. "Boys, for the sake of Old England, for the sake of the regiment, you'll hold 'em. Fire, boys!"

There was a choking cough, while a shudder ran down his frame. The subaltern collapsed into Jim's kindly arms, and lay white and motionless at the bottom of the trench. He was dead; another victim of the Kaiser's murderous ambition, one more count against the German nation. Jim closed his eyes and laid a handkerchief over his face. He noted his name and regiment. Then he seized a rifle and, sitting up, drove hard at the advancing enemy—drove at them with a ferocity and a cold, calculating anger which had never been his before. For the death of this gallant young subaltern had strangely affected him. Even as he sighted at that advancing mass in front and pulled his trigger he was thinking of what might have been, of how peace and plenty might have reigned throughout Europe but for German militarism. And now—now there were folks at home thinking of this gallant young fellow, praying fervently for his

safety. Well, he had died the death of a man—his face to the foe, his courage prime and inspiring. Soon there would be widows and fatherless children in all parts of the Empire, and perhaps some weeping and wailing. Not that people would parade their grief. No. Jim knew his countrymen the world over too well for that.

"It's the price we shall have to pay," he thought. "But we'll pay it; we'll not stand at the corners and weep. We'll take our troubles like men and women—patiently, with courage—and we will remember. The day is coming when this poor young fellow, and many others of us, will be avenged. The Kaiser's days as Emperor of a mighty nation are numbered. Germany has reached a point. She will soon be punished and humbled for all this misery and wickedness."

Zip! His rifle spoke again. Hundreds were rattling to right and left of him, while the enemy's line wavered and swayed. Indeed, no aim was necessary to hit that huge target. It caught the bullets of its own accord, and a merciless rain ripped through it, tearing it to shreds in parts, steadily breaking its face, carrying cruel destruction. Yet still the mass advanced, staggering forward, determined to beat the British. Ah! Men were beginning to creep to the front of the trenches, beginning to get their knees doubled beneath them. Some were already more than half exposed, while one fine fellow near at hand stood upright, defiant. And then there came a rolling, bellowing sound,

the cry of the British Tommy when roused to the utmost pitch of excitement. All along that line of trenches men leaped to their feet and howled at the advancing Germans. Then there came silence, a grim, unnatural silence—the silence of the British bull-dog when roused fully. The moment had come for final action, for deeds, not for shouting. Officers stood in front, beckoning, swinging sword and revolver. Would the men hang back? Did British soldiers need encouragement even though the enemy outnumbered them so vastly?

"Liége all over again, only a little more so," Jim gasped, some ten minutes later, as he again took shelter in that trench. "A little more so, I think. What boys! What gallant fellows!"

Brave indeed, and dashing to an extreme, had our men proved themselves on this and on many another occasion now. But that bayonet charge was convincing. It sent a groan of anguish through the sorely-tried lines of the enemy. It caused the advancing brigade to halt. And then—that fierce shout of joy which had burst from the British still rang in Jim's ears, still haunted many a German. For with it had come the end of that brigade. British bayonets had shattered it. It had ceased to exist. Its members lay silent out there in front of the trenches or were fleeing for their lives. And back in the trenches lay the gallant fellows who had wrought this thing, the thin khaki line of heroes, the cool, calm, cheery sons of the Empire. There they lay, breathing a little heavily after their

exertions, a few nursing wounds, and all joking and laughing again, and already smoking a soothing weed till the next brigade of Germans dared to disturb them.

Truly it was magnificent. Jim tarried with them a little longer, and then struck off to his left, anxious to see how our cavalry were faring. He left the heroes of that trench as cheery as ever, though once again those terrible guns had commenced to pour a devastating rain of shell upon them. Then, pushing far to the left, and sometimes across country which was almost deserted, he came at length to a stretch of ground which had undoubtedly been the scene of a terrible encounter. Here it was, too, that he himself became involved in another wild adventure.

CHAPTER XII

A Cavalry Charge

"HALT! Who goes there? Begorra! sure 'tis mesilf as nearly shot ye. Come in wid yersilf, sor. Them devils has been a-poundin' af the lot af us this three hours and more, and not wan af the boys af us is moving."

It was a big, bluff, raw-boned, honest individual who pushed his face up from a shallow trench till then almost invisible, a man of the gallant Munsters, a solitary defender of Britain's honour in this part of the field, one who had struck hard for Old Ireland. His voice quite startled Jim,—that and the man's appearance. For this soldier had been rolling himself in the wet soil. He was brown from head to foot, browner even than his khaki made him, a deeper colour, which smeared hands and face and clothing.

"Will ye come in for a minit?" he invited Jim again. "Sure ye'll want rest, and it's little ye'll get beyant there. Them Gerrman scum has been wipin' the floor wid their shells, and, begorra! it ain't healthy."

He grinned and pointed to his front and imme-

diately about him. There were other trenches near at hand, some longer and meant for a group of men, others only half-finished. And in and about them lay stark forms in khaki, men of the Expeditionary Force, gallant fellows struck down by German fire from a distance.

Private O'Flannagan smiled grimly as he drew the officer's attention to a few items scattered round.

"'Tis the devil's own squibs they've been firin' at us, sor," he said. "But not even the Kaiser hisself, wid the whiskers af him all together would turn us out. And for why? 'Cos the Colonel he says to us when we gets along here: 'Bhoys, me own boys, ye're here to hold the British left, and if ye fail 'tis likely enough the whole af the army'll be enveloped.' That is, enveloped's most loikely enough the woord he used, only I ain't certain. 'Will ye hold on to it, me own brave bhoys?' he asks. 'Will we hold on to this, Colonel? Ye can take it as held,' we told him. And so it is, sor," the honest fellow told Jim, a flash in his eyes.

"And you've been here long?"

"Long is it, sor? Sure 'tis mesilf has forgotten the toime. But it's hours, and in that toime them German divils has played shells over us as if we was roses and they was waterin' us wid a hose. Then they thought they had killed the lot af us and come on."

He kneeled up in the shallow trench and held out a grimy hand to his front. Jim looked and saw and nodded.

"Rows af Germans. Rows af them, sor. We let 'em come along, and sorra a woord did we say. There was bhoys lyin' dead in their trenches, same as them poor fellows just alongside. There was others foxin'. And we let 'em come, let 'em come till one of our orfficers gives a yell as would scare the old gintleman hisself. Then we was up and at 'em. Yes, begorra! 'tis a blow we sthruck for Old Oireland and the King and Empire. That butcher from Berlin won't have any more need of the men he sent along to fetch us, 'cos—'cos they're there."

Grimly the soiled finger of this gallant Irishman went out to his front and pointed.

"Three hundred and more af 'em, three hundred and more as would have walked through the Munsters. But we're here, what's left af us, and we've done as we told the colonel."

There was pride in the man's voice, a huge, magnificent pride, the justifiable pride of a man who has done his duty and behaved like a man; of a soldier who knows that he and his comrades have no reason to be ashamed of their action, no cause to fear the questions of their commanders.

And the result of the action? Jim Fletcher could see it all around him, could gauge with his trained soldier's eye that the fighting had been indeed terrific. For there were trenches all around never constructed by human hands. They were deep, ragged openings in the earth with a circumference of clear ground all about, and then banks of soil scattered broadcast. Everywhere jagged pieces of

iron and shrapnel bullets lay, while the trenches and their contents told of the havoc those awful shells had wrought. Men had been struck down in little heaps, slain where they lay in the trenches. The brown earth, the beautiful yellow of the stubble, the down-trodden stems of the unreaped corn were withered and coloured a dirty yellow, while even then the fumes of picric acid or of some other corrosive gas lay heavily about. That was the tale in these shallow trenches dug by gallant men. In front the story of the terrible conflict which the Irishmen had fought was as clear as the daylight pouring down upon the survivors. The German dead were dotted about, here in bunches, piled one upon the other, their heads pointing towards the British lines. Elsewhere they lay in twos and threes or singly, stretched on their faces, their limbs thrown out, gaping chest wounds showing where hard-thrust British bayonets had loosened life for them. It was a hideous spectacle. It was a gallant if horrible example of what brave men can do, men who have a fixed purpose, who have faced death to carry out their promise. Above all, it was war—war as it is to be seen in real life, not the war one sometimes reads of. It was hideous, diabolical war, strife for which man's ambition was responsible.

Jim hardly repressed a shudder. "And your supports?" he asked. "They are behind you?"

"Sorra a woord do Oi know, sor," came the steady answer. "But we was told to hold on to this position if all the Germans in the counthry was

to come at us, and hold on we will till the Colonel himsilf or wan of the orfficers tells us to quit it. Will Oi have a cigarette, sor? Faith, now, 'tis the wan thing Oi've been wantin' this half-hour or more. Thank ye, sor, and be aisy as ye cross the open."

Jim left the gallant fellow smoking comfortably, still in his trench, and slid towards the left again. He knew that he must now be almost on the extreme left of our infantry, and was not surprised to see light cavalry in the near distance. Men were thrown out towards the enemy, firing from the saddle often enough, though some were dismounted. Behind them, somewhere in the neighbourhood of a gentle rise, and hidden behind it, he guessed there must be cavalry in some force, waiting an opportunity to pounce out on the enemy. Then he turned and looked towards the German position. Scattered horsemen were returning the fire of our own men, and in the far distance a mass of mounted men slowly rode across the open stubbles.

"Better get out of this as fast as I can leg it," Jim told himself. "If our fellows are behind that rise, as I more than half expect, they'll be itching to get at the Germans. I might get swept up between them, and that would be nasty."

Discretion was a good thing to practise, and at once he began to edge away till the knoll was close beside him, when he halted beneath the shelter of a barn and looked back along the line which he

had been traversing. The slight elevation to which he had attained gave him a great advantage, and now he could see the position of the British force in this part of the field, and could even trace the lines of hastily-dug and unfinished trenches. Afar off he watched shells exploding violently, and heard still their shattering detonations. But nearer at hand, where the gallant Irishman still lay, there had been quiet for a little while.

"Perhaps the Germans have run out of ammunition," he thought. "But they will soon be at their work again, and then these cavalry boys may have to move."

He had scarcely spoken when a screaming roar told him that a shell was approaching. Then came the sharp, deep-throated bark of the distant gun, followed by more than half a dozen of them.

"Couple of batteries posted over this way in front of the cavalry," he told himself. "That looks still more like business. Perhaps there is going to be some big movement."

Already the cavalry vedettes on the British side were retiring, and looking over to where he had seen German horsemen massed, Jim noticed that their own line of vedettes had been strengthened. But as yet the rifle-firing had been insignificant. However, there was soon a change, for groups of horsemen galloped forward, and very soon quick-firers were opening on a spot beyond the knoll, as yet out of his vision. Those guns, too, hidden behind a hill beyond, were speaking swiftly and

loudly, and their shot were actually falling behind Jim on the very edge of the knoll.

"Obviously the prelude to a cavalry battle," he told himself, hurrying along the side of the rise and away from the combatants. It was clear, in fact, that he stood in great danger, and taking to his heels he raced away till he reached a convenient hollow. But even there he was none too secure. For the German cavalry had been thrown out in open order, and their advance and the fire of the Maxims sent the British vedettes galloping for cover. Here and there, too, a man or a horse was hit, and Jim watched in the hope of being able to give help to someone. Nor was he long before being spurred to action. For a horse came racing down toward him towing something at one side, lashing out furiously every now and again as if anxious to be rid of the burden. Instantly Jim raced from his hollow and, suddenly throwing his hands over his head, shouted. The startled horse came to an abrupt stop when almost on the point of galloping over him, and in a moment he had seized the bridle. Then he patted the beast's neck and spoke to it soothingly.

"Steady, horse. Steady. There! Now you feel quieter. Stand, boy. That's the way. That's set your master free. Let me see what's happened to him."

Still gripping the reins, he managed to free the leg of the soldier whom the horse had been dragging, for his boot had become wedged in the stirrup.

Jim bent over him, and rapidly ran his hands over his body and limbs.

"Ah! A gun-shot wound through the shoulder. Knocked him out of his saddle," he thought. "If I leave him here he's as likely as not to be galloped over. But he's a big lump to carry. Steady, horse. It's only your own master. There, he's up and across the saddle. I'll get there too and hold him."

The active Jim was up behind the helpless body of the trooper in a jiffy, when, holding him securely, he set the animal in motion and rode slowly along the side of the knoll. It was some five minutes later that he reached the part hidden from him till then, and came to a sudden halt before the scene now presented to him. For he had guessed aright. That knoll hid a mass of British cavalry from the enemy, though, no doubt, the Taube aeroplanes always circling aloft like huge, ill-omened birds had conveyed the news to the German commander. There they were, each man in his saddle, the horses fretting to be in motion. In rear was a light, galloping ambulance with a surgeon.

"Picked him up out there," said Jim, handing the rescued man over. "Found him being dragged by the stirrup. What shall I do with the horse?"

Crash came a shell beside them, exploding with great violence. Jim was nearly pulled in pieces between the dragging pull of the blast of air which tended to sweep him in one direction and the terrific and frenzied tug which the startled horse gave in

the opposite. For he was still holding the reins, and now felt as if his arms had been almost torn out of their sockets. However, he repeated his question.

"Do with the horse?" came the swift answer, while the surgeon bent over his patient. "Well, as things are, perhaps you'd better ride him for the present. We're just going for those German guns, and things are likely to get lively. Better gallop to the rear, when you can hand the beast over to our supports. Ah! Shot through the shoulder. Quite a trivial wound. Most of these Mausers are, and heal very rapidly. The fall from his horse, and the dragging and bumping he had, have stunned the poor fellow. Hah! What did I say? We're off."

They were off with a vengeance. A half-dozen shells had found their way to that hidden retreat and had set the horses dancing and almost stampeding. Obviously it was time to move away, or losses would soon be incurred. Then there were those massed guns, inflicting, as Jim knew well, such destruction to our gallant fellows.

"Going to charge up to 'em?" he asked eagerly. "And—and there's a mass of German cavalry."

"All the better," sang out the surgeon, still busy with his patient, and utterly oblivious to the shells bursting about the ambulance. "We'll get through 'em, my boy. Nothing like cavalry charges."

"I'd—it's just the very thing I've often longed for——"

It didn't matter what the adventurous Jim longed for; though, to speak the truth, anything with rapid movement, any adventure which promised danger, which was likely to be enlivened by a dash of uncertainty and risk, appealed to him tremendously. He wasn't a cavalry man, yet he could sit a horse tolerably, and hunted occasionally in England. But a cavalry charge! To be in one. What a splendid experience! And then—he was off. That horse paid far more attention to its fellows than to this strange rider. The blare of the trumpet penetrated to its very depths, and at the well-known notes it set off at a canter and ranged alongside the others. Then the trumpet blared again, while, from a point immediately behind them, three British guns began to speak swiftly and noisily, snapping out rapid reports.

"Getting in at those German quick-firers," thought Jim. "Whoa! Nearly off that time. This looks like being in the thick of the business. Wish I had a sword or lance; but no matter, I've a revolver."

What else could he do but tuck his reins nicely between the fingers of his left hand and draw his weapon? As for controlling the animal he rode, that was utterly out of the question. That last trumpet-call had made the brute like a mad thing. It was drunk with delirious excitement and the intense desire for movement. The clatter and musical ring of stirrup-irons and the neigh of other beasts set it galloping madly, and now it

was like a beast possessed, thudding over the ground, its head held high, its eyes blazing.

"Charge, boys! Into them!"

The command rang out loudly, every officer giving voice to it. And those men, those sons of Britain, looking as if they and their horses had been brought up and trained together, clean-limbed sons of Albion, strong, active lads now a little rough in appearance, for a week's growth of beard covered their chins—the boys of this cavalry brigade roared out an answer, roared their delight at the order. Already their sabres were loosened and ready, and it fired Jim Fletcher to his very depths to see their eagerness, to note their courage. Instinctively he followed their movements, rising in his stirrups, leaning forward, talking to his horse, shouting and cheering. And then—of a sudden there was silence in those closely-packed ranks, a curious, ominous silence. The enemy was in sight.

Blare went the trumpets again. The brigade opened out and swung round the corner of the knoll into line. Jim turned and noted the galloping ambulance coming with a rush and a rattle after them. Beside it rode the surgeon, his face flushed, his eyes staring, looking as if he longed and longed to be in front of that charging line. There was more, too, to look at, for, as if it had leaped from the ground, a British quick-firer was visible on the edge of the knoll and was already winding a belt of cartridges past the striker. Rat-

a-tat-tat! Rat-a-tat-tat-tat! Bizz! How it awoke the echoes, and how those British guns in rear pumped shell over the heads of the charging cavalry in the direction of those hidden and murderous guns! As for the latter, the German artillery massed in the distance, it had already received a signal from one of its aeroplanes, and now all its might was directed at the cavalry brigade and at the British guns. Truly this was an inferno. Shells burst in front of the brigade, and men and horses rolled over. Bullets swished past, sending the brown soil ripping amongst the stubbles. And then there was sudden silence, a silence which tried one. It was not that curious, ominous voicelessness which had suddenly come upon the charging British as they cleared the edge of the knoll. It was something very different. It was the silence following a sudden cessation of firing on the part of batteries and quick-firers. It made Jim look up and stand higher in his stirrups.

"George!" he thought, "if only one had a sabre. If only one could take a cut at those fellows."

A trooper beside him, against whom the plungings of his excited horse had carried him, turned and grinned at the officer.

"Clean through 'em, sir, and over the top of the guns too," he shouted, waving his sabre. "We'll follow our officer to the very end, even right to the head-quarters of the Kaiser."

Ah! Jim was nearly off again, for his animal had sprung frantically to avoid a fallen horse and

had nearly unseated him. He dug his knees even closer and longed for the seconds to pass. For the thunder of hoofs was before them. A huge mass of German cavalry was bearing down upon this British cavalry brigade, a mass outnumbering them four times.

Jim's eyes were blazing with excitement now. The trooper was shouting and swearing. Then he shook his sabre again and bellowed at our hero.

"They ain't going to stand for it, the cowards! They're four and more to one and won't stand for their medicine. Blest if they ain't going to turn tail and ride for it. Huh! And we've been fighting long odds all these days, and me and others haven't had an hour's sleep in four long days and nights. Bah! No. What! They ain't really."

"They're going to see it through," Jim bellowed back at him. For the German cavalry had suddenly pulled up, and though in such superior strength it looked immensely as if they would retire in a hurry. Then an officer rode to their front shouting loudly, and at once the whole mass was in motion. And now they were charging forward, direct for the British.

Think of the delirious excitement amongst our officers and troopers! For days and nights they had been helping to protect that vital left flank against envelopment, they and those gallant infantry fellows. They had literally not slept a wink for some four solid days and nights, and were far

more exhausted than even their horses. For the latter could find food on every side, seeing that the harvest in many cases had not been gathered. Then, too, our troops had been for ever retiring, and no soldier loves that movement, and none hate it more than British soldiers. Still, these gallant fellows knew that there must be good reason for the retirement, and they could see for themselves how great was the danger of envelopment. Let us say at once that Field-Marshal Sir John French's first long dispatch made it clear to the whole waiting world — and all civilized peoples awaited Britain's triumph over the German vandal with sincerity—that but for most extraordinary good leading on the part of our generals, but for their coolness and courage and the magnificent pluck and fighting qualities of officers and men of the British Expeditionary Force, that force would have ceased to exist within a few days of its detraining near the Belgian frontier. It occupied a vulnerable position, a position of vital importance to the whole of the Allies, a position which, if turned or enveloped, might have altered the whole course of this commencing campaign, a position, too, which needed heavy reinforcing and numerous supports.

Some day the world will learn why these were not forthcoming. That General Joffre had made dispositions to help the small British force seems abundantly clear. Yet no French troops came in those first few days to help our gallant fellows. Thus it happened that some seventy-five thousand

men held the extreme left of the allied line, some two hundred miles in length, held it nobly. Always retiring, yet presenting a solid front to the enemy, they withstood the most desperate onslaught of five German army corps, an attack rammed home by the Kaiser's orders, so as to strike at the very root of British pride. Just consider the noble behaviour of our troops. In those few days they never rested for more than an hour or so, and they retired over some twenty-five miles in every twenty-four hours, fighting, fighting, and contesting every foot. No wonder that they were sleepy. But had they lost courage? Who dares to insinuate it? It was like the trooper next to Jim Fletcher. Seeing the German horse galloping direct at them, he flung his sabre furiously over his head and rose still higher in his stirrups.

"Boys!" he bellowed raucously, "boys of the light brigade, are we down-hearted?"

How the gallant fellows roared their emphatic "no" back at him, and how they shouted their joy as their leading officer turned and beckoned them onward! Ah! They were sitting down in their saddles now and heads were thrown forward. Fascinated, Jim watched that gallant officer in front, watched and envied him, envied his fine figure, the manner in which he sat his horse, the easy, masterly way in which he led his men. And then he was in amongst the enemy. Like a bolt he had plunged into their front rank, and the horsemen had closed round him. He watched a

medley of rising sabres, and then the brigade met the German horse. It seemed an hour later that a man rose above Jim and struck a mighty blow at him. As a matter of fact only a couple of seconds had passed, a couple of eventful seconds. Jim dodged, and shot the man with his revolver. Then, as he shot forward against our hero's leg, Jim seized his sabre. What joy it brought him, too! Not that he loved slaying for the sake of slaying. But this was duty, this slaying of the Germans. Think, you tender people who have ever stayed at home and never given a blow in anger; think of the Belgian homes wrecked by the Kaiser's vandals. Think of helpless women and children slain by grown men, armed men, brutes encouraged to be brutal. Then imagine a German host in England! Too long we have withheld our hands. Too long we have listened to those who would have had us grow up a timid nation, who would not encourage us to make preparation for that Armageddon which all guessed must be coming. And now it was on us. Was Jim to hold his hand? Were those gallant troopers to be chary of taking German life? A thousand times no! For nothing but the utter defeat of the Kaiser's hosts can bring tranquillity to Europe and Britain. Remember that we entered the war with reluctance. We have now put our hands to the plough. Brothers, let us not look back till the huge work is fully accomplished.

"Forward!" It was the lusty Jim who shouted,

while he swung that new-won sabre aloft. "Forward, boys of the light brigade!"

Boot to boot, slashing and thrusting, and with pace slightly slackened, the brigade wedged its way into the very heart of that mass of German horsemen, and then broke it asunder. One moment the mass was entire and holding together. The next it had burst asunder like a bundle of sticks, and the men who had gone to form it were scattering, scattering with the British boys hard after them. Then the blare of the trumpet came again.

"Form up! Form up there! Now for the guns. Forward! Gallop!"

They swung like an avalanche round the corner of the hill which had hidden those murderous guns, and came full upon them, two batteries, even then pumping shell at the distant British artillery. Men were swarming round them, and in rear a heavy column of infantry lay on the ground ready to support the gunners.

"Forward!" How the men of the British brigade yelled! Then they were amongst the guns, slashing, hacking, shouting.

It was done. Even as Jim reeled in his saddle and tumbled, captured horses were backed to the guns and hitched to them. Then the trumpets blared again and the British rode away triumphant. They left many a German on the field. They left, too, many a gallant British gentleman, officer and trooper.

CHAPTER XIII

Guggenheimer has a Visitor

"PLEASE, sir, a gentleman to see you." The maid knocked at the door of the ground-floor room given over to the sole use of the man known to Professor Fairleigh as Maurice Mervin, the naturalized Englishman, the patriot who found it good for his health, and, no doubt, for his pocket also, to live at Portsmouth. "A gentleman to see you."

She had opened the door immediately after knocking, and discovered the lodger poring over some papers spread on a table. Even the swift jerk he gave to a daily paper failed to hide his doings, nor did the movement escape the girl entirely.

"And the master says as he ain't no German spy," she muttered to herself. "Well, I ain't so sure, not by a long way. Show him in, sir?"

Gustave Guggenheimer—let us retain his original name, and so refuse to allow this obvious spy to sully in the smallest way a name having the shallowest pretensions to being British—Gustave Guggenheimer stared angrily at the girl for a

moment. He was conscious,—cool, calculating rascal that he was,—that his colour had heightened. Also he shrewdly suspected that the maid had observed his hurried action with the paper. He was angry with himself for his clumsiness, annoyed excessively that he had omitted the usual and common-sense precaution of locking the door so that no intruders could be thrust upon him, and no one even by accident suddenly gain admission. He scowled, and thereby converted a girl who till then merely suspected that this Guggenheimer was not all that he pretended to be, into an active enemy, a red-hot patriot, one who was sure that the man was a great deal more than others suspected.

"And it's no use a-bein' angry," she told him, bridling at his anger. "I knocked. You didn't answer. So, time being precious, and me that full of work, I opened the door. There's one as wants to see you."

She omitted the description she had formerly given. "'Cos he ain't no gent, this visitor that's come, not he," she told herself with an imperious shake of the head. "Blest if he ain't one o' the same sort of kidney. When my Jack comes home —and he'll be away somewhere with the fleet a-whoppin' the Germans—when he comes back with a pocket full o' prizemoney I'll ask him to take a look at this fellow. Yes, sir. Show him up. Who is he? What name? Don't know, sir. He never mentioned one."

"He is tall and thin and dark?" asked Guggenheimer carefully.

"All that. And a bit more," the girl muttered *sotto voce*. "One o' the same sort as this. Out of the same basket."

"Then show him in."

Gustave Guggenheimer's beady eyes flashed as the door closed, and at once the lame gentleman in whom the simple-minded Professor took such an interest, even now when Germany's odious plans and schemes were laid bare, became as active as a cat. He swept those papers up and bundled them into a drawer which he locked instantly. Then he sank into a chair, and when a knock sounded on the door he was peacefully smoking.

"Come in," he called. "Thank you, Kate. That will do. Now——"

He waited till the maid had gone, for she had shown a disposition to remain, if only long enough to hear these two greet one another, these two whom she suspected. For those were the days of general suspicion. Not similar to those which had passed in Germany, when innocent folks were set upon for the only reason that they were foreigners, and when numbers had been ill-treated; but the careful days which followed the onset of war, when the eyes of simple Britishers were opened, and when, thanks to the daily papers, each person looked closely at his neighbour to discover if he were a lurking spy, an alien enemy, even if he were German. Not that all Germans were spies. But

vast numbers were, without shadow of doubt—aye, and amongst them those duly naturalized—men who had eaten our salt and partaken of our hospitality for years.

One hardly wonders now at such treacherous and mean conduct, having had so many examples of the views which Germans as a nation take of what is right and wrong. When a ruler and his government refer to a solemn treaty as a mere 'scrap of paper'; when they attempt to bribe a great country like Britain to act dishonourably towards her friends, and believe implicitly that she will do so, and express amazement at her indignant refusal, then there must be something wrong about Germans' views of honour. Be that as it may, this crafty wretch, this Guggenheimer had no scruples as to his own behaviour. He made a rapid signal as the door closed, and the visitor responded. By then Guggenheimer had dragged himself laboriously to his feet, for even to his accomplices and friends this man gave out that he was lame. He trusted no one, not even himself. Least of all would he trust the new-comer. Hobbling across to the door, he gripped the handle and suddenly threw the door open.

"Thank you, Kate," he said, and this time there was no trace of anger about him. "I only wanted to say that you need not wait. We shall not require you."

Then, smiling grimly, he shut the door, locked it, and hobbled back to his seat. Outside he left a

very angry and exceedingly mortified Kate, for the girl had been caught in the very act of peeping through the keyhole.

"But she won't again," Guggenheimer chuckled to himself. "She'll get right away to the kitchen and stay there. She'll have to go. I'll tell the Professor."

In his own mind that ended the matter. And as a matter of fact this rascal had obtained an extra ordinary ascendancy over Gladys Fairleigh's father. Guggenheimer did as he liked with the household, except with Gladys. And she—she hated and distrusted the man. She suspected him, though she had not a tittle of evidence. But his attempts to be agreeable, the unwelcome attentions he would have paid her had she permitted him, made the girl half-frightened, half-resentful. It angered her, too, to find that she was by no means mistress in her father's house.

"Now—you will smoke?"

The tall, cadaverous stranger leaned forward and took a cigarette. He accepted the chair which Guggenheimer offered, and slowly struck a match. Beyond a single swift glance at the lame man seated opposite him, he had not once raised his eyes from the floor. Now he sat and smoked, smoked slowly, never opening his lips to speak, smoked and looked at his cigarette, at the floor, at the exquisite pictures which Guggenheimer owned and with which he had adorned his room, at his own boots and Guggenheimer's—but never at the

latter's face. And thus, in silence they sat for a full five minutes, the one smoking and doing nothing else in particular; the other regarding his visitor with a piercing gaze, a gaze which took in his lanky, cadaverous face and form, his attenuated figure, his sunken cheeks, and the evidence there was in abundance to prove that the man was half-starved and anything but prosperous. Indeed, the contrast in boots worn by the two told its tale too plainly. Guggenheimer's were elegant, black, shiny boots, with brown leather tops—boots you could see your face in. The visitor, on the contrary, wore a pair of tattered button boots, of which the right was minus five buttons, while the left seemed to have come in for excessively harsh treatment. It gaped between sole and upper, where a glimpse was to be obtained of a bare foot. That told a tale also.

"Hum! There is little doing," reflected Guggenheimer. "But wait——"

He tiptoed lamely to the door, leaning heavily on his stick, and again threw it open. The passage was empty. Kate had undoubtedly absorbed one lesson.

"We can talk," said Guggenheimer, reaching his chair again, and speaking in German. "There is little doing."

The visitor stirred and took a second swift view of the other's face. Then he leaned back and fastened his attention on that tattered boot. A mere dull shake of his head showed that he had heard the observation.

"And there are many near to starving."

The man looked up swiftly. There was a hungry look in his eyes. He stared at one of the pictures, and reflected that if he could but be possessed of one of those he could live in comfort for a while, perhaps till the Germans reached London. His emphatic nod, the quick stamp he gave with one of his feet was sufficient.

"But," said Guggenheimer, very deliberately, "but there may still be work to do."

"Ah!" The man gave vent to that exclamation and sighed. Then he broke his silence. "When our brothers come," he asked swiftly. "Yes, when they come. But—the British fleet? It is at sea. Still, our armies will steal through at night. Then there will be work, work for all of us—bridges to break down, railways to destroy, public buildings to raze to the ground. But——"

"But what?" asked Guggenheimer coldly, watching the man as a cat watches a mouse.

"But it may take time, and—and many of us are starving."

A wolfish grin swept across Guggenheimer's hidden lips. He stroked his moustache as if fearful that it had not sufficiently disguised his feelings. "Many will starve," he said curtly. "And many also will be imprisoned and tried by the British."

"Imprisoned? Tried?" the man asked in startled tones.

"And shot as spies. There will be evidence against them."

Either the cadaverous man was weak and fainting with hunger, or the shot had gone home and he knew himself likely to be one of those who would suffer. Guggenheimer had meant him to think that. There had been a sinister note in his voice. He had as good as pointed a condemning finger at the wretch seated in the room with him. In any case the man was shaking like a leaf, while cold drops of perspiration hung on his narrow forehead.

"Shot!" he gasped. "As spies! There is evidence?"

"There will be evidence—will be," said the rascal, goading him. "Will be, my friend. You can perceive the difference? No? You cannot? Then listen to this. This evidence——"

"Which the British authorities have, and on which they will shoot spies——"

"Tut! Tut! Wait now; wait a little moment. Yes, Kate is a good girl at times. See, here is brandy and a tin of biscuits. You may like some refreshment. Drink that off and eat the biscuits as we chat. There, you feel better already. You were tired."

The crafty Guggenheimer, seeing that his visitor was too overcome almost to speak, and was certainly becoming fainter, wisely offered him what he had. He sat, his stick in one hand, a cigarette in the other, watching this unfortunate wretch like a cat. His yellow eyes blinked wickedly. Behind them a wicked, crafty brain was thinking out, step by step, the plan which must be followed to gain

the end for which he had been so long plotting. For Guggenheimer was a conspirator amongst conspirators—one who, as we know, would willingly sacrifice a comrade or make use of one for his own purposes. Let us be frank with regard to that incident in Brussels which Jim Fletcher had witnessed. Monsieur Hervey, whom he had denounced as a spy, was, in fact, one of his own accomplices, a crafty, sneaking spy. But he was also more. He was a man of ambition, almost as quick and clever as this Guggenheimer, and in some way or other he had contrived to unearth the chief plot of this arch-villain. This Monsieur Hervey, of the Rue Lenoir, of Brussels, at that moment occupied by a seething host of Germans, this spy knew what Guggenheimer knew regarding Gladys Fairleigh. And, unfortunately for him, Guggenheimer knew that he knew, and had taken swift steps to put an end to his plotting. But here he had different ground on which to work—easier ground, ground softened and broken by sheer privation. Spying had at this stage in the affairs of Great Britain and the Germans become a rather precarious game. In any case it wasn't any longer lucrative. It brought in insufficient wherewith to feed, much less to clothe and lodge a man. And this visitor, this lanky, silent fellow, this Schwartz —for that was how Gustave Guggenheimer addressed him—this Schwartz was in dire straits at the moment.

"You feel better?" asked Guggenheimer sweetly.

"Better!" the man blazed out in anger. "Better! I who have starved this two weeks and more—you ask if I am better. Bah! But let us return to your statement. Evidence will be given against spies, you said. Then, my friend, you also will suffer."

The lanky man gave his neighbour a sudden vicious look. Guggenheimer laughed loudly.

"Not so," he said. "Not so. Even were you to denounce me to the authorities they would not harm me. I have been careful. But you—you were working in Scotland, eh?"

Schwartz started and shivered. "Yes; in Scotland. What then?"

"What then? It is from Scotland that evidence will be given."

Schwartz's jaw had dropped. Guggenheimer sniggered behind his moustache. It was bliss to him to see this wretch squirming. "It is the men employed in Scotland who will be shot," he added pleasantly. "Come, another cigarette."

But Schwartz was too overcome to accept the invitation. He sat upright in his chair staring at that gaping boot. There was thick sweat on his forehead. It was gathering into big drops, and already they were dripping from the point of his nose, having run there down a channel across the seamed forehead.

"Shot! Evidence against those who worked in Scotland."

"Certainly," Guggenheimer agreed with him.

"But—but the evidence is not yet given. You said 'will be'."

"I did."

"Then who—how——?"

"Now we are speaking as one sensible man to another. Take that cigarette," said Guggenheimer, his ferrety eyes shining with wickedness. "Now listen. There is one in Scotland, one who lives in the wilds, and who feigns to be stupid and bizarre, eccentric, as these fools of English name it. Well, he is no fool. He is a British agent."

There was a wild look in Schwartz's eyes. "British agent!" he muttered. "An eccentric man! Bizarre!"

"Precisely. Lives in an out-of-the-way part. Tall, stooping shoulders, thick-set, muscular. Fishes and shoots for a pastime. Wanders about alone. Almost a hermit. At least that is his character. Really he is a clever fellow. That man must have been a find for the British Government. He hoodwinks everyone. He almost took me in."

"Wait!" Schwartz's eyes were almost protruding from his head. He was standing to his full height now, speaking in low, excited tones.

"Tall. Stoops. Muscular. Peculiar. Much alone. Fishes. Shoots. His name?"

"His name?" Guggenheimer smiled. "Really, Schwartz," he expostulated, "am I a child? Or are you so dense? You have worked in Scotland. You have been posted in a lonely part where certain British secret appliances were under test. And

you tell me that you do not know this man's name! Poof! You waste time. And after all, I am only acting as your friend. I am giving you a warning. Let us say this though, without mentioning the name. The initials are——"

"T. F.," Schwartz interrupted him swiftly.

"Good! That is correct. And curiously enough the man is related to this fool of a professor with whom I live. Is that enough?"

"It is," Schwartz told him fiercely, his protruding eyes again fixed on his bursting boot.

"Then you are warned. I have done you a kindness. Remember, the evidence is not yet given, of that I am certain. But soon it will reach the authorities. Then——it must be unpleasant to be shot," reflected Guggenheimer, striking a match with which to set light to his cigarette. "Very unpleasant."

He was watching the man secretly, closely. He saw his lanky figure squirm at those words, and noted the colour ebbing and flowing in his sunken cheeks. He was not by any means surprised by the outburst which followed. Indeed, double-dyed villain that he was, this outburst was what he aimed at. It was one of the steps in the carrying out of a diabolical plan. It was one stage nearer to the murder of Thomas Fairleigh. The crafty ruffian had worked upon the fears of a weak accomplice, had fooled him indeed, for never was there a more harmless, if useless, individual than the Professor's brother. But what mattered that to this coward?

The man's death would be a stage forward in his plot. He wanted a helper, wanted to make him work as if for himself. Here was the man—this craven, this Schwartz, and here the tale which would certainly rouse him.

"Give me money," Schwartz demanded fiercely. "Give me gold, gold, enough to get to Scotland, enough to feed myself on the way, to give me strength."

"And then?" asked Guggenheimer indifferently.

"Then—then I will kill him! You hear. I will kill him. I will stop this evidence. You have warned me. Thereby you prove yourself to be my friend. Now save me. Give me gold. Let me go at once. Quick! I will repay when times are better."

It was like the wily Guggenheimer to lift his hands as if in horror and appear to expostulate. But this was precisely what he hoped for, and he cut his expostulations short through fear of robbing Schwartz of his determination, and at once handed money to him.

"Of course. Glad to help," he told him. "But —but, of course, you mustn't tell me such tales. And—and you don't mean what you say."

"Don't mean what I say! Don't mean to kill him!" Schwartz was nearing the door. He turned and spoke softly, deliberately, as a man does who has a fixed purpose. "He is dead already," he told the villain watching so closely. "That evidence is stopped. You have been a friend indeed. Now let me go. It is a life-and-death matter."

"For Thomas Fairleigh, certainly," smiled Guggenheimer when he was gone, seating himself, and smoking with evident relish. "Let us say that the old man is gone. Then there comes the son. Well, he is at the front at this moment. Soon he will be shot or beaten back into Paris. I shall know. I have agents watching for me, agents on the German side. I myself can easily act on the British. Then there is only the girl to be attended to. That also is a matter which one may say is already settled and done with."

He helped himself to some spirit and filled the glass with soda-water from a syphon. Holding the sparkling fluid before him he inspected it critically, with evident approval, for he smiled, smiled almost sweetly, the smile of a man who is eminently pleased with himself and contented. Then he gulped the spirit down, wiped his moustache delicately on a silk handkerchief, and finally bounded from his chair. There was no lameness about this wretched fellow now. He was active, alert, almost cheery, if the wearing of a sardonic smile can be termed cheeriness. Guggenheimer had reason to be pleased, reason to feel that at no risk to himself he had furthered the plot which he had so long been hatching.

"It's all coming out as I planned," he told himself, using the most polishèd English; for this accomplished scoundrel could think in the best of Anglo-Saxon, argue in his native German with a fluency and depth there was no denying, while his

mastery of languages allowed him to converse in half a dozen, not as a tourist converses, but as a cultured individual might do in each and every individual country. Guggenheimer was, in fact, a genius, with an ingenuity for all that was rascally transcending even his powers as a linguist. He was vastly clever and cunning, vastly wideawake; and yet, Guggenheimer the German spy, the man who hoped to steal Gladys Fairleigh, the plotter and schemer, had a peer, one who perhaps was even cleverer. Strange to relate, that man was Monsieur Hervey, the wretch he had betrayed in Brussels, the man who had discerned his secret and who had plotted to get the better of his chief.

But Hervey was dead, you will say. Not at all. He slid from behind Guggenheimer's desk as that worthy departed from the room and banged the door, locking it from the other side. It was the same Monsieur Hervey whom Jim had seen in Brussels without a doubt—moderately young, fair, heavily built, given to Teutonic fatness. He stood there for a while, listening. Then he came forth and refilled his chief's glass with spirit and soda.

"Here's to the plot!" he laughed, scrutinizing his own reflection in one of Guggenheimer's antique mirrors. "Let our friend Schwartz—a man with a heart of stone and the courage of a cockroach—let him proceed with his portion of it. Let Thomas Fairleigh die. Also let us hope that good German lead may find the heart of the son who is in the

British army. Further, here's to Guggenheimer's success in carrying off the lady. After that—well, Guggenheimer, there is a little affair to settle between us, and what matters it to the lady if it be Monsieur Hervey who comes to claim her hand?"

He was actually grinning at his own reflection. Then, with a sudden dive, he went behind the desk again. But it proved to be a false alarm, and a little later he was in the open. But Hervey was a careful if bold fellow. Not once did he attempt to interfere with his rival's possessions. Those papers in the desk, papers which he had been closely scrutinizing for ten minutes past, he replaced with scrupulous care. All that he may be admitted to have taken was more of Guggenheimer's spirit and soda, and a few of his really excellent cigarettes. Then Monsieur Hervey went the way he had come. He slid through the window. He left not a trace behind. Even the wily wretch who had once denounced him had no idea of his coming. How could he, indeed, seeing that Monsieur Hervey certainly should have been dead quite three weeks ago, shot by a file of soldiers?

"But alive, very much so," laughed Monsieur Hervey as he left the house. "Alive, and just waiting and watching."

CHAPTER XIV

Surrounded by Uhlans

It was late in the evening of that strenuous day when British cavalry had charged and destroyed German guns and gunners that Captain James Fletcher, of the Flying Corps, became vaguely aware of his surroundings. His first moments of semi-consciousness may, indeed, be said to have brought some annoyance. For he scowled. Jim Fletcher, the good-tempered, jovial fellow, scowled. He tried to sit up, and discovering himself firmly held down, growled angrily. Then, with a huge effort—in desperate haste, in fact, for of a sudden his sleepy brain had recollected something of that last adventure—he flung aside the weight which bore him down and sat up blinking, blinking at the rays of the westering sun then pouring full into his eyes.

"Hulloo!" he exclaimed, and laughed. A huge man was lying across his legs, a man whose face was half-covered by his spiked helmet and who appeared to be sleeping.

"If you don't mind," said Jim politely. "But you are crushing the feeling out of my legs. How

long you've been there, my friend, I don't know, but——"

A second movement on his part had caused the helmet to tumble from the man's face. Then Jim gaped. Till now he had been only half-sensible, though conscious that he had but lately been engaged in some rattling adventure. Now the very fact of that helmet falling brought him fully to his senses. For the man's face exposed was deadly white and cold. Jim touched it and shrank back. Not that he was timid. Nor had he been through this terrible fighting so far without seeing death and wounds in abundance. But here it lay so close to him, hugging him, pressing the life out of his own body. For this huge German gunner was a heavy weight, and moreover, the nature of his wound made his presence all the more hideous. Jim shuddered and endeavoured to free his body and legs. Then, exhausted by the effort, he sank back again and for a while lost consciousness. It was an hour later when someone shook him.

"Eh?" he asked.

"Time we was moving, sir, if we're to get out of this. There's three of us alive, and you'll make a fourth. Them Germans are coming."

"Germans! Coming! I don't care," he murmured wearily. But the hand shook him still more firmly.

"We're a-goin' to take you along with us, sir," he heard. "There ain't no others left alive, and if we leave you them devils'll kill you. Tom,

catch a hold of the orfficer's legs. Jack, you get to his head. Now, up with him."

But that was a thing Jim would not allow. He might be drowsy, still a little inclined to lapse into unconsciousness; but he was no child, no baby to be carried in the arms of these soldiers. With a huge effort he opened his eyes and pulled his shattered wits together. Then he laughed.

"That was magnificent, eh, boys?" he asked. "A grand charge. And clean home too. What's the matter with me?"

They had dragged him to his feet, but to Jim's amazement and disgust he could not stand. His wretched legs doubled up beneath him. It made him groan with anguish.

"A baby after all. Have to be carried. What's wrong with me?"

The gallant troopers leaned over him and gently examined his limbs.

"Wound on top of the scalp," declared one of them. "A good deal of swelling all round, and I expect that's what put you out o' time. Nothing else, sir. Not a sign."

"But my legs. I can't move 'em," Jim told the troopers, his eyes contracted with anxiety. Indeed, he recollected something of his mishap now. A huge German—it must be the very one who had been stretched across his legs and body—had suddenly fired a revolver at him. Then his horse had plunged, and afterwards there was a blank. As a matter of fact the bullet had brought the horse

down in its tracks, while a British sabre wielded by the man who had been riding next to Jim had helped to destroy the German. As to our hero, he had been thrown violently, and his head happening to come in contact with an ammunition caisson, he was stunned and rendered helpless. But what had happened to his legs?

"Beginnin' to get some feeling in them," he told the troopers, smiling at this welcome discovery. "I do believe that that German lying on me numbed the limbs and precious nearly smothered me. Rub 'em for me, boys. But, I say, what a gallop we had! Magnificent! How did your men come off?"

They told him with huge glee that their losses had been small, and those of the enemy exceedingly heavy.

"While I reckon we must have helped our boys away in the trenches," said one of the troopers, gloatingly. "Those guns were pounding them to pieces and beating our left wing back. The cavalry's had a say in this retreat. We've helped to hold up the Germans."

They had indeed. As Jim looked round he saw evidences all about, not only of the accurate fire of the British guns, but also of the dashing charge of the cavalry brigade. For immediately adjacent—in fact all round—were what remained of those troublesome German guns, some wrecked by British shells, others rendered useless by the troopers who had abstracted the breech-blocks and other move-

ments. Everywhere there were dead German gunners. They hung over the limbers and guns, they were under the wheels, and even under the horses of the British cavalry, for some of the unfortunate beasts had fallen. Indeed, in this great war, as in others, the loss in horseflesh to both the Germans and the Allies was phenomenal. Dead horses lay in all directions; while here, amongst the guns, there were two or three still alive, still neighing helplessly and looking appealingly at the men about them.

A little way off, lit up by the flaring rays of that glorious evening sun, were what remained of the strong force of infantry which had supported the gunners. The men had occupied a fold in the ground, and were advancing towards the guns as the British cavalry burst in upon the latter. Now those men were dead. Hardly one had escaped. They lay in heaps, in little hideous groups, in ones and twos, some quite peacefully, as if sunk in sleep. But it was the sleep of death, the sleep which knows no awakening. Farther away across the way which the British mounted brigade had followed vast numbers of figures were lying, a few wearing the uniforms of those gallant fellows whom Jim had accompanied. The rest were German, with one exception. Close to a light ambulance which had lost a wheel and was half-capsized lay a big chestnut horse, and still seated on its back, yet with arms thrown forward about the glossy neck, and face buried in the mane,

was the surgeon with whom our hero had chatted. He, too, had paid the price. His gallant soul had answered the last and biggest summons.

"Better, sir?" asked the men.

"Almost able to walk," Jim told them. "What then?"

"Don't know, sir. Suppose we had better move away or we shall be taken. Our fellows have retired all along the line and the Germans are advancing."

That five minutes' rest, and the rubbing his limbs had received, had done Jim a world of good. He could stand now, with a little help, and walked, or staggered to and fro for a little while. Far in rear, from the position the enemy had occupied, a blue-grey mass was advancing slowly. Red Cross ambulances were moving out in front, and already German army surgeons were succouring wounded. Jim quickly ascertained that the three troopers were not severely damaged.

"Thrown against one of the guns," one told him. "Knocked out for a while. Fit for duty now, sir."

"One of them German cavalry tweaked me over the head with his sabre," another ventured. "If it wasn't that I got the point of my sabre well under his ribs, I'd be wanting to see him again. He's gone the way of many."

Yes, the way of many and many a gallant fellow, of thousands now, of vast numbers who might yet be living had it not been for this war. Of a truth

those who stir up such contests, who use their best endeavours to cause rather than to make war impossible, have a crime of vast proportions to answer for. Even the conquest of kingdoms and of riches beyond dreams do not compensate for such lives lost, for the young manhood of nations slain, for the empty homes, the fatherless and the widows.

From a clump of trees near at hand two Germans straggled forward bearing rifles. Sighting the four who had survived the cavalry charge, they rushed at them with their levelled bayonets. At once Jim staggered to the nearest dead man and wrenched a sabre from his hand. But one of the troopers was quicker. He secured a rifle, shot out an empty cartridge, and covered the Germans.

"You clear off," he told them in rasping tones. "There's been a lot of killing here this day, but there'll be more afore I've done if you don't get a move on. There! We ain't got nothing against you for the moment, so leave us alone."

And leave the British troopers alone the Germans did. They had already had a taste of their fighting qualities, and now slunk off, the trooper keeping them covered with his rifle.

"Then we'll go too," Jim said. "Is there anything to prevent our rejoining our own troops?"

"Everything. Thousands of the enemy," one of the men said, shielding his eyes with his hand and pointing with the other. "The Germans have got between us and our friends already, sir. They're following swifter than ever."

"Surrounded! Bound to be made prisoners," declared another, his face flushing with anger.

"Not if we can help it, men," Jim told them, standing erect now, and stamping more feeling into his legs. Indeed, he could walk already, and would perhaps be able to run in a little while. As to being taken prisoner—"Never!" he declared. "We'll have to hide. Look around in the haversacks of these Germans and see if you can find some food. We'll want weapons, too, and horses when we can find 'em."

"Or steal 'em, sir."

"Certainly. Or steal them. All's fair in love and war."

His cheery words, the obvious courage of this officer, set the men laughing. What had they to fear? Nothing compared with the dangers they had already come through. Running the gauntlet of the enemy would be fine fun. But that idea of searching for food was good. Instantly they set about it. But it was a long while before one of them returned successful, having dragged open the haversacks of some twenty of the poor fellows lying stark about the guns.

"Must all of them have been about starving, sir," he told Jim, displaying a roll of French bread and a chicken. "The fellow I took these from must have descended upon a farm-yard by himself. The others had empty haversacks."

Stuffing the food into a borrowed haversack, and each of them taking revolvers and ammunition

from the dead gunners, the quartet set out from that eventful spot, the troopers turning to Jim for guidance.

"We'll have to get away to the left of our men," he told them; "and there we shall have to run the gauntlet of crowds of Uhlans. Suppose we borrow German helmets and coats. No, no. I won't use even that help. We'll see what we can do for ourselves as we are. Look down below there. You can see a long wood, and that should give us cover. It's getting dusk already, and during the night we'll slip out and look for horses. How will that do?"

The grins of delight on the men's faces showed that they were pleased enough; and at once, keeping to the folds in the ground, and taking care to avoid showing against the sky-line, where the slanting rays of the sun would certainly have betrayed them, they made slowly in the direction of the wood which Jim had pointed out. And as they went they had perforce to pass over the ground occupied that day by the British. Here and there were outlying trenches, small affairs capable of sheltering only half a dozen men. Dead horses lay on the ground, and in one place a tumbril thrust its broken shafts into the air, having tumbled into a ditch and been abandoned. A little later they reached the high road, which was here cut into deep ruts and littered with cartridge-cases and bits of exploded shell. A little way along it, too, something familiar to Jim caught his eye. It was

a London omnibus, with the roof seats removed, lying over on one side with two of its wheels shattered.

"Wonder who was the driver," he thought. "Hope not that fellow who brought me along with him. Let's go and see. Perhaps we shall find something worth taking."

They trudged to the stranded bus, and had no difficulty in learning what had wrecked it. For one side was smashed in and broken, while the wheels were torn from their axles. There was abundant evidence, in fact, to prove that a shell had been the cause of its undoing.

"And it isn't an ammunition lorry either," said Jim, beginning to ferret about in the wrecked interior. "I've a notion that it has carried rations, and—— Here, you men, here's a find. Tins of bully beef. Biscuit. Cheese and coffee. Sugar too. All we want now is a kettle and a fry-pan."

The wrecked bus proved indeed a great find, and they left it, laden. Nor had they to search far for the utensils they desired, for, on opening the box beneath the driver's seat, one of the troopers found knives and forks, kettle and fry-pans, besides dry sticks with which to make a fire. By then it was almost dark, and seeing that none of the enemy were about, Jim and his men sat down and ate heartily. Not that they ventured to light a fire, for that would have been foolhardy; but they were able to satisfy their immediate wants, for all were ravenously hungry.

"Shows that fighting's good for one," Jim told them with a gay laugh. "Now we'll get off to that wood and have a sleep. Early in the morning we'll prospect for horses."

All were almost worn out after their exertions, and after the almost continuous fighting and retreat of the past few days. It was therefore not surprising that, once within the shelter of the wood, they fell asleep without exception, and would no doubt have slept on till late in the morning had not the rumble of wheels on the adjacent road awakened them. Then Jim was roused.

"Troops passing. Been passing for some while, I think, sir," the trooper told him in a whisper. "Some of them have broken ranks, and I thought just now that they were going to enter the wood."

Instantly our hero was at the edge of the wood, where through the grey mist of early dawn he examined the enemy. Hundreds were passing along the road, the heavy tramp of their feet being easily distinguishable. The dull rumble of wheels continually to be heard showed that a long transport train was in motion, while nearer at hand were groups of horses with men standing beside them.

"A force of all arms," he said, for he caught sight of guns on the road. "Still following our fellows. Wish we had some of those horses."

"Why not, sir?" the trooper asked him with a grin. "There's only fifty of 'em, and what's fifty Germans!"

There was huge contempt in his tones. But

then he, like the rest of the Expeditionary Force, had learned a great deal in the past few days—one thing above all. The much-vaunted invincibility of the Prussians was a myth. Four to one they had failed to break the British—aye, often fifteen to one they had made but little impression. There was no doubt, too, that had the British been of even numbers, and not under orders, there would have been no retreat, but a rousing advance with the enemy flying.

"Why not, sir?" the gallant fellow asked again. "We're game."

"Why not?" Jim thought the matter over with beating heart. He knew that he and his men were surrounded, and that to endeavour to reach their friends by a direct route was absolutely out of the question. Their only hope lay in cutting away to the left flank of the British till well beyond the German brigades, and then rushing their way through the clouds of Uhlans then endeavouring to outflank our brave fellows. If that were impossible, then they must make for the coast and trust to getting a boat round.

"We'll do it. We'll have some of those horses," he told the men. "How many revolvers have we? Two each?"

"Two and one over, sir," one of them told him with a grin. "I fetched three of them away."

"Very well. We're well armed. Let's wait and see how matters go. That troop will surely throw out men in rear, and those are the fellows we must

make for. They're moving now. There goes the order to mount."

From their leafy shelter they watched the German dragoons swing their legs over their horses' backs. At a whistle from an officer the whole party cantered off in wake of the column of wagons and troops which had just passed along the road. Then, even before the troopers who accompanied Jim could give vent to their disappointment, the clatter of more horses was heard in the distance. A little later half a dozen came trotting through the gloom, their riders carrying their rifles slung, while pipes dangled from their mouths. Jim at once gave the word, and instantly the four slipped from the wood and walked sharply into the open. Doubtless they were taken to be Germans at first, for the German troopers paid no attention to them. But a little later, when but thirty yards intervened between the two parties, one of the dragoons gave vent to a grunt of amazement and dropped his pipe in the effort. That set the others laughing.

"You'll have to wait till you kill an Englishman before you can smoke again," one of the men sang out, turning to look at the pipe lying in pieces on the road. "But that will be soon, very soon. A man can afford to break pipes by the dozen."

"And have heads broken too. Idiot!" the other shouted. "Can't you see? There are four of the enemy before us."

The information brought the dragoons to a sudden standstill, and for a few moments they sat

their horses and stared at the British four, amazed to find them in the heart of their own force, amazed at their effrontery, inclined to laugh at the bold front they were showing. Then one swiftly unslung his carbine. Instantly Jim fired, and the man dropped the weapon and took to swearing and holding his arm.

"At them!" he shouted. "That pig of an officer has shot me through the hand. Shoot them down. But—but leave the officer to me. Leave him to me. Himmel! I will teach him to shoot Hans Schiffler without warning."

He omitted to remember that he himself had proposed a second before to shoot our hero. But then, that was as it should be. Meanwhile his comrades had been swift to make ready for the struggle. Swinging their sabres from their scabbards, they dug spurs into their horses and rode hard at the quartet standing on the road in front of them. It looked, too, as if they would easily ride them down or cut them to pieces. But those troopers were not to be so easily taken, nor, being horsemen themselves, were they to be unduly frightened by the animals bearing down upon them. They shouted and waved their arms. Then, making rapid use of their revolvers, they quickly brought three of the dragoons tumbling from their saddles. A fourth, happening to escape the bullets, cut savagely at Jim as he passed, and missed him by the merest inch, almost falling from his horse with the weight of the unrelieved stroke he

had delivered. Before he could recover, Jim had snatched at his boot, and in a twinkling the fellow was sprawling on the road.

"Get hold of the horses!" shouted Jim, seizing the bridle of the one nearest to him. "Quick, or they will gallop away after the others. What luck! We've four, and good ones too, or I'm mistaken. Prepare to mount, my lads. But wait. Those sabres would be useful. A mounted man is useless without some sort of cutting weapon."

They stood over the wounded and discomfited dragoons till they had relieved them of their sabres and belts. Then at Jim's command the little party mounted and went cantering off, leaving four Germans at least a little more respectful of the British than they had been. Taking to the open, Jim and his men galloped for some miles, and then walked their horses. Happening to come upon a big stretch of wooded country, they then took to this cover till they judged that they were some twenty miles towards the left of the line on which the British troops were retiring.

"Ought to be able to get round to them here," thought Jim. "If not, we shall have to make for the coast. What's that?"

"Uhlans, sir," one of the men reported. "The country swarms with them. Blest if they ain't in every direction."

There was little doubt that Jim and his friends were not even now beyond the enemy, and must continue in a westerly direction. Indeed, ten miles

farther on still discovered Uhlans between them and their goal.

"Then we'll make for the coast, and chance getting a ship to take us round," Jim told them. "It's useless trying to break through here, for there are so many of the Uhlans that we should certainly be captured. I for one want to get back to our friends."

"And we too," the troopers chimed in.

"Then let us put our horses into a steady canter. We will rest when it gets dark, and by starting at earliest dawn we ought to be able to reach the coast early to-morrow."

The next day, in fact, took them to Boulogne, where their arrival on captured horses won them no little attention. Then Jim bade farewell to the troopers, for he had discovered that cavalry reinforcements were in the town waiting for an opportunity to get to the army. He himself then sauntered down to the water to discover whether any ship were sailing round to Havre, by which means he might return to his duty. It was while he was tramping down the mole that a jaunty figure in nautical blue accosted him.

"What, Jim Fletcher, the one and only Jim!"

"You—Dicky Dance! Of all the luck! Here, I want you."

"And for what?" the sailor asked him, as they shook hands heartily.

"For what! To carry me round to Havre. You've a ship, no doubt. Here's a job for you."

Dicky exploded. "Of all the cheek!" he roared. "As if His Britannic Majesty's boats were kept for army officers, and as if naval lieutenants had nothing better to do than to cart them about from one port to another! What do you want?"

It was like the jovial Dicky to explode, and then to betray some interest.

"Merely a passage to Havre, so that I can rejoin my corps. You can do it, Dicky, my boy. I always said that Dicky Dance was good for anything."

The sailor grinned. "You've cheek enough for a hundred," he laughed. "But it does happen that I'm over here shepherding transports, and have received a wireless to coast along and see that none of those dirty German mine-layers are hanging about. Not that they're likely to have slipped off in this direction. But you'd be sea-sick."

Jim patted him on the back. He wasn't in the least nettled by that last remark. "I'll come now," he said, "as I stand. You can see the full extent of my baggage."

They clambered down the steps of the mole and boarded Dicky's destroyer. Then they put to sea and headed for the port of Havre. But Jim's was even to be a more lengthened absence. For a wireless message reached them, causing the volatile Dicky to show some excitement. He gave a sharp order and the ship swung round. In a few seconds she was tearing her way at her fastest speed in the reverse direction.

"And what about me?" asked Jim, disgusted.

"Don't you worry," came the satirical answer. "You ain't the only one to get a bit of fighting. We're off to see what we can do about singeing the Kaiser's whiskers."

CHAPTER XV

A "Scrap" off Heligoland

ALL night the little destroyer had been chugging her way through the moonlit, oily waste of waters, and already the day was drawing near, so near that the watch on duty stretched their arms and yawned. It was nearly time for the morning watch to be posted, and then what a sleep they would put in!

"Some of them toffs ashore don't know and won't believe what it is to be out here in the North Sea a-watching for dirty Germans," one of the watch right forward grumbled. "I'll tell yer this, mate: if that Kaiser and his fleet don't put out into the open soon, well——"

He didn't quite know what expression to apply to that distressful condition, a somewhat wonderful thing to record in a sailor. But there was disgust at any rate, for the honest tar spat over the rail, his action, the growl in his tones, everything denoting disgust and contempt.

"Which ain't a-sayin' as we're to be out here a-dodgin' backward and forward fer evermore without having a sort o' scrap," his companion ventured quite three minutes later, when Jack Nelson,

his bosom "pal", had settled down to brooding silence. "This 'ere German fleet, where is it?"

"Aye. Where is it? That's what we're all a-askin'."

The dissatisfied one again showed his contempt and annoyance by violent expectoration. "It's what we're all a-askin'," he said. "What's a fleet fer, Bill?"

"Fightin', o' course."

"Yes, fightin'. Fightin' all the while. Ain't we here a-waitin' ter get a go in? Ain't we a-playin' the game? But you can't get in a fight if there ain't a alien enemy, nohow. Where's this Kaiser? You wait. We'll singe his whiskers afore we've done with him."

That was the impression up and down the fleet. Even Jim Fletcher's short sojourn on the destroyer was sufficiently long to let him know what sailors thought of this big war. They were proud of themselves, as sailors of the British Navy have ever had cause to be; they had confidence in their officers, in their ships, and in themselves. And their officers knew that they commanded the same bull-dog breed which Nelson and Collingwood and Drake, aye, and many another had done before them. And there they were out in the North Sea, a sea as yet placid and kindly, patrolling, patrolling the livelong day and night, watching for the enemy, longing for him to come out, ready to sink mine-layers, submarines, anything which should venture into the open. And as yet, but for a submarine

attack on the part of the Germans, when one of the vessels was promptly sent to the bottom, and for the rounding up of mine-layers, there had been little excitement. No wonder the fleet was itching and chafing for action.

"But it's coming now," Dicky confided to his chum as they sat on the deck in the early hours of the morning. "We're off Heligoland now, and are drawing in with our destroyer squadrons. I shall soon have my orders."

In the wireless house the instruments were even then clicking, while as the night lifted and the light grew and grew, so did the suspicion amongst Dicky's crew that something was afoot.

"We're a-haulin' in to 'Eligoland or some sort o' place," one tar confided to another, putting a huge hand to his mouth and attempting a whisper. However, his voice was like a fog-horn, and he was peremptorily silenced.

"Stop talking there. Silence!" came from the nearest officer.

"Yus, silence fer the minute," the incorrigible fellow managed to whisper in a lower key a little later. "But when the band begins, just won't there be a ruction. Do yer think we're in fer an action?"

"Yus," came the short answer.

Down in the stoke-hole the same idea had permeated, and had already caused quite a little sensation. Greasers and stokers wiped their sweating foreheads and exchanged views. Even the cook

managed to find his way on deck and stood looking landward.

"Best get breakfast ready, and a bit 'o 'ot stuff into the fellows," he told his mate. "Bull-dogs fight best when they're fed, and we've to put up the fight of a lifetime. Oh, if only that there Kaiser with the curling whiskers 'd come out with his bloomin' fleet!"

A thick mist lay over the water, a mist which seemed to hang upon the oily surface, cloaking everything, even the immediate surroundings. Then it lifted a little, and the crew of the destroyer felt their hearts lifted likewise. There were two submarines near at hand, floating on the surface, with their crews lounging on their narrow decks, consuming their morning ration and taking a breath of fresh air. Motoring along they kept abreast of the destroyer for a while, till she came up with some of her fellow-destroyers. Then orders came from an invisible source, orders which set the Marconi operators busy. The men aboard those submarines waved jauntily to their chums aboard the ships, and disappeared down the narrow manhole at the top of the conning-tower. Jim watched the gallant fellows, saw the manholes closed, and then the submarines sink out of sight with a gurgle and a swirling splash which were worth watching.

"Fine fellows," he thought. "The risks they take must be great. I'd like to have a turn aboard one of those submarines."

"You've enough already for most people," Dicky

told him with an excited grin, for he had made Jim give him all the details of the land fighting. "The average fellow would have been shot long ago. Seems to me you're being kept for something different. You'll swing yet between sky and earth. As to submarines. Well, it's a risky and a fascinating game. There's Denis Galloway, the man who put me through my first few cruises. Don't know what fear is, Jim. He'd baffle the very best of the Germans. I've known him take his submarine out towards the enemy's lines during manœuvres, and motor within easy range when it was too dark to see your hand before you. But he'd seen the enemy earlier on, and from a long way off, and had taken bearings. Well, arrived just there, he sinks—sinks plumb to the bottom, and there he and the crew spend the rest of the night, yarning, playing cards maybe, sleeping. At dawn he gets his torpedoes ready and pops his periscope up. There's the fleet, snug and handy, with the bugles going for breakfast. Denis sends 'em a torpedo instead, which, if it had been loaded, would have sunk one of the Dreadnoughts. Then he bobs down again. Waits till the fuss and flurry are over, and away he goes. He's aboard one of those two boats running to landward of us."

"What for? What's the manœuvre?"

"You wait," Dicky told him. "We don't give games away in the Navy, my boy. But I've told you something already. We're going to try to singe the Kaiser's whiskers."

Aboard that destroyer, as aboard all the others running in company with her, there was a suppressed air of excitement. For the crews felt that at last, after days of monotonous watching, they might really come into actual touch with the enemy. Gun crews hugged their weapons. Gun-layers ascertained, for the thirtieth time at least, that everything was as it should be. As for the individual men, they stood staring out into the mist wherever they were able, stretching their ears and waiting—waiting. A fine, sturdy lot they looked, too, stripped to their vests, their splendid arms bulging with muscle, and presenting on their surfaces a picture gallery in tattoo. And slowly, as the morning advanced, the mist lifted.

"Heligoland," whispered Dicky to Jim, as if he was afraid the Kaiser's watch-dogs would hear him. "Now you'll see a little game. Those submarines will draw them."

Jim stared at the two vessels which had kept them company in the very early hours, and which now lay inshore of them, well within the Bight of Heligoland. They were floating helplessly on the surface, as if broken down and out of action, distinguishable from the shore without a doubt, and faintly so from the decks of the destroyers.

"They're the bait," chuckled Dicky, his voice shaking with excitement and anticipation. "Ten to one the enemy's spotted 'em already. That's the sort of naval warfare to suit 'em. Two submarines to be picked up without firing a shot. Lots of

kudos, don't you know, and no trouble about it. They'll be out after 'em in a jiffy."

He might have been a prophet, for a very few minutes later the dull, dirty-grey hull of a German destroyer poked its way from behind the bluff of the island. Smoke was blowing from its funnels, and white foam massed high at the prow. In rear came a second, and others behind.

"A regular armada," grinned Dicky. As for the men aboard, they could hardly be prevented from cheering.

"They're just bursting for a downright bit of fighting," the lieutenant confided to Jim, as if the officers of the fleet were not also guilty of the same sentiments. "They're just gluttons for a row, are these boys of ours, and they feel nasty about those mines. They look on the sowing of mines in the open sea-way as a dirty trick, just the sort of thing one could expect of people who set no store by a treaty to which they have put their signature. So if there is a row, well—the Kaiser's untried navy will have to look to itself. They'll have hard knocks, and straight ones, from our fellows."

You might have doubted that statement if you had gone round the decks of those destroyers lying off the steel-girt fortress island of Heligoland, watching their submarines draw the enemy out and waiting for possible battle. Never were tars more jovial and facetious. He with the fog-horn voice and giant limbs kept the men immediately adjacent

to him in a ripple of laughter; for he was never done with his asides, never finished with his comments on Germans, the Germany navy, German rations, and a hundred other facts distinctly alien. But when he came to Lieutenant Dicky Dance his tone became decidedly different.

"If 'e ain't just a bit of orl right," he observed, *sotto voce*, but in such gusty tones that it was a wonder Dicky himself did not hear. "There he stands, a-smokin' the best o' cigarettes, and a-lookin' about 'im as if the whole o' the German Ocean was his, and the bloomin' ships in it. German Ocean. Pah!" He turned his quid and sent his eyes up to heaven. "'Oo give that Kaiser permission ter call this 'ere sea a German ocean, that's what I wants to know?" he asked indignantly. "'Oo give him 'im leave? Not us. Not Great Britain. Eh?"

"'E give 'imself leave," a fellow-salt answered. "The Kaiser don't ever ask permission for anything of anyone. Why? 'Cos 'e's it. Just it."

"Hoh! 'E's it, is 'e? Well now——"

It was fortunate, perhaps, that at that moment an order was passed down the decks, while Dicky Dance gave vent to an exclamation. For besides the enemy's destroyers, a cruiser was thrusting her bows out from behind the shelter of the island. It looked, indeed, as if the Germans were coming out in force to secure those two submarines. Not that the latter were likely to be taken easily. For they were slowly motoring out to sea, out through the

mist to the British destroyers, slowly drawing the enemy on towards those who waited their coming, and who as yet, it seemed, were hidden from them. Men bustled about the deck as that cruiser hove in sight, and there was a suppressed cheer as a second followed her.

"Going to be a scrap after all," said Dicky jauntily. "There go their guns. Ain't they anxious to take the submarines!"

Think how those tars fidgeted as they waited—waited for the order which would send them against the enemy, waited in fear and trembling lest the Germans should suspect the trick that was being played upon them, and turn back into their own waters! And how their faces lit up when the destroyers suddenly headed straight for the island. Men gripped their guns. The layers hovered over them. Even the cooks found their ordinary duties too much for them.

Crash! How the enemy's guns roared as the destroyer flotillas came into action! For, with a sigh of relief, the British crews learned that the battle was not to be refused after all. The enemy was in greater strength, and came on boldly. Then Jim Fletcher had an illustration of how they do things in the Navy, of the dash and keenness of the man in blue. For the destroyers rushed at the Prussian boats, and not satisfied with a reasonable range, must needs run in close to them. Soon shells were flying through the air, and one, happening to strike the funnel of the boat on which Jim

stood, sent splinters of iron all over him. Dicky grinned.

"How's that?" he asked.

Jim smiled at him. "You come ashore after this little business is over and try a little German shell-fire in the trenches. But this is hot!"

It was more. It was almost terrifying even for those accustomed to being under fire, and few of the men aboard Dicky Dance's destroyer could say that. Yet they conducted themselves like veterans; and though now joke and laughter had gone, and grim determination had taken their place, there was no quailing, no ducking heads, no looking anxious. Instead, the men of the gallant little destroyer pumped shell out of their guns till the barrels were almost red-hot, till even the loading mechanism was becoming uncomfortably warm. And yet, with all their hurry—for time here was of vast importance, and each gun's crew must put in as many shots in the minute as possible—even in spite of the rush, the roar of the pieces, the violent detonations, and the crash of shell bursting about their ears, the gun-layers made fine shooting.

"That's given 'em all they want," reflected the huge tar with the fog-horn voice, staring through the gun-port at one of the enemy destroyers which was even then drifting out of action. "She's hit between wind and water and don't want no more. If the skipper knows what he's up to——"

"Know's what he's up to!" growled a comrade with huge disdain. "Ain't he Dicky Dance? and

isn't he always there or next door to it? We're rangin' up alongside another, and at this distance we'll send shell right through her."

For twenty minutes perhaps the British destroyers had a warm time. True enough, the shooting of the Germans was nothing compared with their own, and was miserable at times. Shell went wide of the British ships, or flew overhead, or plunged into the water near at hand. But some struck their mark, and when they did there were terrific explosions, portions of the ships were carried away, and splinters were flung violently in every direction. Nor was it long before men were down and ugly streams of blood were trailing across the iron decks.

"Hot work!" ejaculated Dicky again.

"Hot it is," Jim agreed in nautical manner; "and likely to get warmer. The enemy's light cruisers are coming into action, and it looks as if you might get a drubbing."

The tables had indeed been turned of a sudden, for now three of the Prussian light cruisers were pumping shell at the British destroyers, and their heavier metal was bound to have an effect. Still, the gallant fellows commanding our destroyers were not likely to allow themselves to be frightened. They were in the thick of a warm engagement, and would not back out. But a shout from Dicky set the men cheering. For out of the mist came steering a British light cruiser, signals flying from her masts and her guns already unmasked for firing. Nor was she alone. She had consorts with her,

who soon made the conflict a more even one. Indeed, she and her consorts were already signalling the bull-dogs who had attacked the German boats to get out of the way, and in a little while their heavier guns were sending shell aboard the enemy's cruisers. Perhaps five minutes later the mist opened up to disclose British battle cruisers steaming into the firing line, and almost at the same moment a huge cheer burst from the crews aboard our vessels.

"That's given 'em snuff, believe me," said Dicky Dance, his eyes glowing. "By the list that cruiser has got she's bound for Davy Jones's locker, and—and the other's already afire. She's shot to pieces. Her funnels are gone, and she's already going down by the head. Ah! There go our cruisers' boats to pick up the crews. Jimmy, my boy, this'll keep our lads in good heart for the big battle, when the Kaiser takes it into his head to bring his big fleet out to meet us."

There came a roar of anger from the boats near enough to see what next happened. For actually shots were directed at the boats launched by one of our cruisers for the purpose of rescuing the enemy. The missiles could be seen splashing the surface of the oily sea, throwing spray over the men pulling at the oars. However, a burst of firing from another of our cruisers soon put an end to that, while the rescue boats went on to their work without halting. As for the enemy's fleet, those destroyers which had not been sunk and were still under steam had already put about and were racing

for their haven. A cruiser, too, was going off into the mist, well on fire and heavily listing.

"As good as lost," Dicky told his chum. "That makes three of their cruisers. A nice little bag for one morning, and something worth hunting for. And just fancy, the enemy thought they were going to pick up two submarines without trouble, and that there was nothing to fear! We've drawn their teeth nicely, and I tell you they'll be glad of the tale back in Old England and all over the British Empire."

There was jubilation on every face, even upon those of the wounded. Already, too, there were signals flying from the commodore's ship offering that generous and hearty congratulation which naval officers in command know so well how to give. That, and the cheers of crews as the different destroyers slid past one another or came near the cruisers, provided a scene of excitement which few would forget; while it was added not a little to by the spectacle of the sinking German cruisers. The one which had burst into flame had now rolled completely over and was showing only her stern, with some yards of keel standing up in the air and her screw blades glistening in the sun, which had now come out to chase the mist away.

What matter if down below in the sick-bay quarters doctors were at work with their staffs making good the damage that German shells had done? It was the price which these gallant tars gladly paid for such a victory. There would be weeping, too, back in England when the Admiralty reports were

published, for the roll of honoured dead had been added to by this brilliant little action. Yet all was not loss. Even those who had need to mourn might yet comfort themselves a little. For their menfolk had died for a principle. They had died to keep Britain's honour clean, to keep her place bright in the eyes of all nations. They had died that the British flag might still fly at the top of the mast, and that future generations of our race—aye, and of many other races—might live in freedom and happiness.

"A nice little brush," was the way in which Dicky Dance described it. "And a lesson to the enemy. It'll show 'em that if our soldiers ashore can hold up five army corps and give 'em a hiding, we afloat can keep our end up. Now, Jim, we've orders to make for port and go under repair. This poor little ship has had a mauling."

It was late on the next day when the destroyer, in company with other vessels which had been engaged in the action, steamed slowly into a British port to the accompaniment of wild cheers from the crowds awaiting their arrival. Proud, too, did Jim Fletcher feel of his naval friends as he took stock of the vessels. For not one but showed the handiwork of the Germans. Bridges were torn away, and whole lengths of rails had gone overboard. Here and there were wide shot-holes, while the particular boat on which he stood had lost one funnel entirely. But if the boats were battered and the crews also, the latter had lost

nothing of their courage and their spirit. They clung to the rails, the guns, to anything which gave a hold, and shouted back at the mob of eager friends awaiting them. And breaking out above all the cheers and calls came the fog-horn voice of that particular mariner who held Dicky Dance in such obvious admiration. He was right forward, and his bulky frame seemed to cover the deck.

"Mates," he bellowed, "let's give 'em back a cheer so as the lasses and the boys'll know that we're hearty. Let 'em see that if we've plucked a hair or two we ain't done yet by a long way with singeing the bloomin' Kaiser's whiskers."

When Jim left the deck of the destroyer and stepped ashore, the mobs were thick about the sailors and were still cheering and singing. He pushed his way through them, and made for the railway-station. He almost wished that he were staying with those gallant tars, and that duty did not call him elsewhere. But there was the Expeditionary Force in France, and there was the Flying Corps to which he belonged. It was with eager impatience, therefore, that he took ship that night and hurried to rejoin. Nor was he to be long out of action or free from danger. For Jim Fletcher had enemies to deal with other than those dressed in the blue-grey uniforms of the Kaiser's battalions. There was the wretch Guggenheimer, with whom he was again to come in contact; and those who crossed the renegade's path or thwarted him in the slightest had found this Guggenheimer

merciless, treacherous—worse even than the wretched vandals who had wrecked the noble city of Louvain and slain its inhabitants. Who could say? The gallant Jim might yet meet his end, not in battle, as he longed might be the case, but at the hands of this wretched, scheming malefactor.

CHAPTER XVI

The Plot Works

THE stationmaster of the tiny wayside halting-place along the range of the Scotch metals touched his cap as a stranger descended from the first-class carriage in which he had travelled from London.

"Mr. Frank Stanton, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly!"

"Then there's a carriage waiting outside, sir, and I was to say from Mrs. M'Closkie that it's all right."

Mr. Stanton fumbled in a trouser pocket and produced a shilling with which he rewarded the stationmaster. He was a tall, moustached, English-looking individual, which was something to be proud of and thankful for in these days, when every person one met stared at one to ascertain if he were another of the numerous aliens infesting England. Mr. Stanton was obviously not that. His ruddy features, his bold, fearless look, his generosity proclaimed the Englishman of means, while the cut of his clothes and the nature of his luggage showed that he was a sportsman.

"Thank you, stationmaster!" he said breezily. "Fine news, eh?"

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A BRILLIANT NAVAL RAID OFF HELIGOLAND

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"Fine news, sir? But we get little here. We have to wait long for it. What news, sir?"

"British cruiser and destroyer fleets managed to lure the enemy out and cut 'em up badly. Fine, eh?"

"Fine!" It was magnificent. The stationmaster set up a cheer, which was lustily supported by the solitary individual who assisted him, and who performed the combined duties of porter, ticket collector, switch man, and lamp cleaner during the various hours of his service.

"Man, it's grand!" this latter worthy shouted, while he conducted the stranger towards the somewhat rickety carriage awaiting him. There a huge, work-worn paw was outstretched to catch the sixpenny-bit which Mr. Stanton tossed to him. Then the driver, as seedy a looking individual as his horse, and as rickety as his carriage, caused his whip to crack, and the vehicle drove off. Distinctly and decidedly Mr. Stanton had left a good impression.

"He's a fine man, and a sportsman," the stationmaster observed to his helper. "He'll be about this way for a time, for Mrs. M'Closkie has let him her rooms for a fortnight. He's here for the shooting, and he'll have the news of the war telegraphed. That'll be good. We shall get it also."

If Mr. Stanton managed to create a good impression, and indeed came as quite a welcome addition to the little Scottish hamlet—for times were bad, and the war had sent the greater number of visitors

back to their homes—the other individual who also arrived by that train would hardly have been so successful. For, to commence with, he came unarmed with a ticket. Then his long journey, partly beneath the seat of the carriage and of late beneath one of the swaying coaches, had not improved his general appearance. Yet he was beaming with good nature as he slid away from the station, having managed to elude the observant eye of the stationmaster and of Sandy his assistant.

"Up to time," he told himself, consulting a gold watch strapped about his wrist. "I've travelled before now and been less comfortable. But it wouldn't have done to let that fellow see me. He's always suspicious. He'd even distrust a dead man, and I'm dead—that is, he thinks so."

He went off into deep chuckles, while his whole face lit up wonderfully. Yet there was a sneer about the mouth, a tightening of the lips, a glint in those mild Teutonic eyes which betrayed something beyond that usually indicated by a smiling expression.

"Let him wait. I'm just looking on. Let the two of 'em work the plan till the time comes to interfere," he muttered. "But—yes, a man wants food and drink after such a journey. That carriage has gone on a quarter of a mile. Ah! it's stopped yonder. Well, I'll not forget the spot. Now for comfort for the inner man."

He dived into a tiny village inn and called for food and drink. Then, having paid his account,

with a generous amount added for the attention he had received, he casually asked whether he could sleep the night.

"Fact is," he said languidly and in excellent English, "I'm tramping across country, and the bustle on the railways has resulted in my baggage going astray. It'll be here in a day or so, I'm hoping, and meanwhile I shall require a room. I've come for the sake of the scenery."

Could anyone suspect such a glib story? Even though mine host glanced at him sideways, he was bound to confess that his visitor looked prepossessing and harmless. Besides, he was undoubtedly inclined to be generous, and was possessed of money. That, too, weighed with mine host, and he had felt inclined to kick himself after seeing the handful of gold which his visitor drew from his pocket.

"Might have charged him double that amount for the accommodation he wants," he thought, bowing before his guest. "Shows one oughtn't always to judge by appearances. Because his clothes are shabby and dusty, I took him to be poor. Well, he's been tramping, and that don't make for tidiness. As for the amount, well—there'll be extras," he reflected.

"Yes, sir," he said, with greater show of respect. "Come to sketch, sir, perhaps."

"That's it. To sketch. But I'll have to wait till my things come along. Meanwhile I can be hunting up some subject. Here's the money for

a week's board and lodging in advance. I like plain food and plenty of it."

Thus it happened that the little Scottish village admitted two strangers into its houses on identically the same day, two individuals who appeared to be unknown to one another, and who certainly had not travelled together. Their occupations, too, seemed to be entirely different; for whereas one, Mr. Stanton, went away on foot on the following day, carrying a gun over his shoulder (for there was wild moorland all round and excellent rough shooting), the other man, the one dressed in somewhat road-worn clothing, sauntered off in the opposite direction, his hat pulled down to keep the sun out of his eyes, a pair of blue spectacles shielding them, and a stout stick in his hand.

But dissimilar though they were, and apparently utterly unacquainted, it was curious that the arrival of a third man on the scene should cause them to act in much the same manner. He came upon the untidy individual an hour after the latter had left the inn, when he had doubled on his tracks and was actually following after Mr. Stanton.

"Good day!" said Monsieur Hervey, for the reader will have guessed that the untidy man was he. "Fishing?"

"Y-e-es. Certainly; fishing."

"Caught anything?"

"Well—er—that is—hardly."

"Oh!" Monsieur Hervey did not wish to appear impolite. He repressed a smile and took stock

of this stranger. He was a middle-sized, broad-shouldered, shambling fellow of some fifty or more years of age, whose face was covered with a thick fair beard and moustache. There was a vacant look about the eyes, a weakness of the mouth, and a falling away of the chin which pointed rather to intellectual deficiency. Then his halting, aimless speech, his shambling walk, the whole appearance of the man helped to confirm that impression.

"Live here, sir?" asked Monsieur Hervey. "A native?"

There was a certain eagerness about his voice, and he awaited the answer with impatience.

"Er—well—yes. That is, I don't at times."

"Got a house elsewhere, no doubt. Might I ask your name, sir?"

The mild, vacant eyes looked straight into his. The hesitating, drawling voice answered, and at the reply Monsieur Hervey started. He had anticipated it, yet he started. It made him flush to think that he had such luck.

"Er—name; why—er—Thomas Fairleigh," he heard.

"Thomas Fairleigh. Ah! Er—good day, Mr. Thomas Fairleigh."

Monsieur Hervey hastened away. Indeed, he almost ran from this mild and harmless individual. Striding across the moorland, he cut round in a wide circle and presently reached a spot covered with thick gorse. There he lay down to watch the retreating figure of the amiable Mr. Thomas Fair-

leigh. Nor was it long before he saw another figure in the distance. It was that of Mr. Stanton, gun over shoulder, strolling across the moor and looking blankly about him. He, too, had no doubt at length seen that shambling figure, for Monsieur Hervey saw him hurry his steps and finally accost the harmless Mr. Fairleigh. And thereafter happened that which may be fairly said to have been common to Mr. Stanton and Monsieur Hervey. The latter, as soon as he had ascertained the name of his acquaintance, hurried away. Mr. Stanton did precisely the same. More than that, he hurried till he too reached cover, and from a point of vantage watched the aimless figure of Mr. Fairleigh wandering about the moor.

It made Monsieur Hervey chuckle.

"Who'd have thought of such a game being played up here on this moorland?" he giggled. "The sort of place where a poet would come to dream in, to rave about; or an artist to paint and sketch from a hundred different positions. Thank goodness I'm not afflicted with poetry or painting! I'm out for business, like Guggenheimer, like Mr. Stanton, as he calls himself, now that he's well away from Portsmouth."

How it made the rascal laugh! He crawled along close beside the bank of gorse till he was behind the other watcher, and could see his crouching figure as well as that of Mr. Fairleigh. Then he produced a parcel from a capacious pocket.

"The man who comes out on a game like this is wise if he remembers food and drink," he grinned, speaking aloud as if to cheer himself. "Well, Guggenheimer may be able to ignore such matters; but for me, I am always hungry. Besides, I have so little to do. I have only to watch and wait. Quite a lot depends on Guggenheimer."

Perhaps two hours passed, and all that while the two watchers slinking behind their gorse covers kept a casual eye on the pathetic figure of Mr. Thomas Fairleigh. He wandered aimlessly about. Once he dropped the fishing-rod he carried and gave chase to a butterfly, using his hat as a net. And then, as if he suddenly recollected that having brought a rod and line with him he had intended to fish, he shambled to the bank of a stream which crossed the moor, and swung his line in. It was just about then that the watchful eye of Monsieur Hervey detected a man's head rising from behind a boulder within a hundred yards of the fisherman.

"Ah!" he gasped. It made a little thrill run down his back. Not that Monsieur Hervey was given to thrills. They ill become a practised spy; and to do him justice, he had often and often encountered dangers and adventures which would considerably have upset the average individual, and had literally not turned a hair. But this matter was a personal one. It implicated Guggenheimer, and Guggenheimer was a demon, a brute, a traitor, one against whom Monsieur Hervey nursed a bitter

grudge. That was why the sight of that head lifting cautiously from behind a distant boulder thrilled the spy to his marrow.

As for Guggenheimer, slinking behind the cover he had selected, a little in advance of Monsieur Hervey's and to one side—nothing ever thrilled that cold-blooded and cruel scoundrel. Yet, when at last his eye lit upon that rising head, he actually started and changed colour. It was in moments such as this that he found sometimes the need for something, as it were, to preoccupy a little of his attention. As if by force of habit Guggenheimer drew a cigarette from his case and lit it.

"Ah!" he said at last, blowing out a grateful cloud of smoke. "He's here, then, after all. I was beginning to doubt him, to wonder whether his pluck—what little he has—hadn't evaporated. Ha! Schwartz at last."

There was a hideous gleam in his cold, calculating, scheming eye. To a casual observer the clever Mr. Guggenheimer, alias Maurice Mervin, might look British enough. But at this very moment nothing could disguise him. In spite of his immaculate shooting suit, his deer-stalker hat, his eye-glass, his wonderful stockings and typically English boots, Guggenheimer looked at that moment what he was—an alien, a brute, a sour-faced, scheming scoundrel. There was a hideous cold glint in his eye as he raised his figure ever so little, and judged the distance existing between the harm-

less, unsuspecting fisherman and that other crouching figure peeping at him from over an adjacent rock.

"Depends," he said. "If it's a gun, perhaps. If a revolver—pish! I doubt that the fool has pluck enough to hold it firmly. But we shall see. This is positively the most interesting little plan that I have ever operated."

It was the most ghastly and cold-blooded conspiracy that the mind of man could ever have conceived. It was diabolical indeed; for here was Guggenheimer, the polished German spy, the lame visitor who lived with Gladys Fairleigh's father and enjoyed the hospitality of the British—here was this rascal actually watching an accomplice whom he himself had egged on to do murder. Why was he there? Who could guess? Perhaps, with the suspicion that always filled his mind, he could not trust the rascally and craven Schwartz to carry out the foul deed alone. He must see it done. He must make sure that this Thomas Fairleigh, this harmless, half-idiotic individual was safely removed from his path. Perhaps it was that reason that had brought him to the north. In any case, the thing was odious. It was beyond the conception of a decent Englishman. This sort of scheming matched well with the double-dealing, the heartlessness, the cruelty of the German spy as this great war had proved him to be.

One man, however, seemed to understand every movement of this rascal Guggenheimer, and to find

amusement. Monsieur Hervey was actually giggling as he rose on his knees and watched the fisherman dabbling his line in the stream, the crafty Guggenheimer behind his bank of gorse, and that other figure lurking behind a boulder—that Schwartz, spy like Guggenheimer and Hervey himself, the wretch egged on by one to slay the harmless fisherman.

"It's a game, it is!" he laughed. "To think that there are three of us all watching and waiting! Schwartz, the chicken-hearted one, waiting to get nearer to the madman, waiting to screw up his courage. Guggenheimer waiting and watching too, waiting for Schwartz to come up to scratch and kill his man thoroughly. Then me, me who have the game in my hands, me, Monsieur Hervey, who have more than riches to gain! Ah, I'm waiting patiently. I have the ball at my feet, and soon Guggenheimer shall become aware of it. Then——"

The man went red at the neck, and the colour flushed all over his body. He clenched his two fists till the long, well-cared-for nails were punching little red lines into both palms. The lips, too, were parted, showing irregular teeth firmly closed together and grating. Ugh! It would have made any decent man squirm—the hideous gritting of those teeth, the look of fiendish hate, of dreadful cunning and hope in the man's eyes. Of a truth that picturesque Scottish moor, all green and yellow with gorse, all shimmering beneath a gorgeous

sky, harboured some precious villains. It seemed incredible that amidst these boulders and streams, beneath that azure sky, three such rascals could have gathered, three rascals associated together in a dastardly crime which was about to be committed; three fiends associated together yet widely separated in their aims, and in the case of two of them eagerly watching that one whose head peeped up from behind a distant boulder. Of a truth the scene was beyond belief. It made the wretch Monsieur Hervey actually chuckle.

"And to think that Schwartz doesn't know that Guggenheimer's come to watch him do the deed, and Guggenheimer don't guess that I'm here to watch both of them! It's a game, a deeper game than ever I've played before."

"Ah! He's screwing up his courage. He's worming his way nearer. He's armed with a revolver."

Guggenheimer was kneeling up himself now, and watched with eagerness as the villain Schwartz slowly emerged from behind the boulder which had sheltered him till now. Creeping on hands and knees, watching the unconscious figure of the fisherman with bulging eyes, the wretch crept slowly and steadily nearer to him. It was horrible, so horrible that an average individual would have screamed out a warning. But not so Guggenheimer and the worthy Monsieur Hervey. The latter was even then kneeling up, and calmly consuming the last of the provisions he had brought

with him. As for Guggenheimer, he had sunk back again on to one elbow, for he had discovered a convenient little aperture between two bushes which enabled him to watch the drama taking place below him. The man was smoking still, smoking languidly, watching carelessly it seemed, and yet the eyes which stared down at Schwartz were flashing with suppressed emotion.

"Will he?" he asked hoarsely. "Has he the courage? Or—no! Schwartz must have been very fearful for his own skin, for he has actually managed to carry out the work with thoroughness."

Was there ever such a cold-blooded scoundrel! As he lay there watching he had seen this Schwartz creeping nearer and still nearer to Mr. Thomas Fairleigh, the harmless, almost lunatic fisherman. He had seen him approach to within fifteen feet of his victim. And then the latter, hearing a sound perhaps, had turned mildly upon the man about to slay him. He seemed to ask a question. He even smiled an inane welcome; and then—snap!—a revolver shot rang out.

"Finished!" exclaimed Monsieur Hervey from behind his screen. "Scene one has come about. I'm rather interested now to learn what our friend Guggenheimer will do in the matter. Slink away, perhaps, eh? That's what he'll do, and at once proceed with the other plans he's made. Well, he'll find me ready when the time comes. As Germany will most certainly conquer England, a man may just as well marry an English wife as

a German. Capital! The thing's like a play, and there's been no waiting so far."

Was there ever a more cynical rascal? There, down below him, lay the stark figure of that poor imbecile fisherman, murdered, done to death at the instigation of Guggenheimer. Monsieur Hervey gave not a thought to the fact that he might have saved the man had he wished to do so. No, if the murder pleased the spy who had once denounced him in Brussels, it pleased Monsieur Hervey even more. For were not these two fellows actually playing into his hands? He laughed loudly, joyfully, and then sat up of a sudden. Indeed, he went creeping swiftly down the slope so as to get within ear-shot of the spot where the murder had been perpetrated. For Guggenheimer had left his retreat and, cigarette in mouth, was sauntering down towards the river, sauntering towards the spot where Schwartz stood over his victim staring and staring at him. Let us say at once, villains though all three were, this Schwartz was the least villainous of them, perhaps because he lacked courage. In any case, the deed he had just committed seemed to have stunned, almost horrified him. So absorbed was he, in fact, that it was not till Guggenheimer was close at hand that he observed his figure. Then he started back with a cry of horror and raised his weapon.

"One moment!" Guggenheimer arrested his hand and forced him to lower the weapon. "Thank you," he said coolly. "Now look at me

closely. I am not the stranger you thought I was, but——"

"Guggenheimer!" the wretch gasped. "Guggenheimer! You—I came here to stop the man preaching—I—you saw—you saw——"

Guggenheimer nodded. "Yes," he said, smiling.

"And you will keep what you have seen to yourself? You will not——"

Guggenheimer took a long inspiration till his lungs were filled, and inspected his cigarette critically as he blew clouds of smoke from between his lips. Actually he was watching Schwartz askance. He noticed that the wretch was trembling.

"Depends," he smiled. "I—you asked for money. I gave it to you. But not for this—not that you might commit murder. For murder the law in England hangs, hangs a man by the neck till he is dead. Hangs him, Schwartz, as a criminal of the basest."

"But you—I told you that I would kill him. He would have betrayed me to the police. You knew it," the desperate Schwartz gulped.

"Knew it! No. You told me, perhaps. But then, think, friend Schwartz. In the past you have declared yourself prepared for desperate acts. Have you accomplished them? I think not. Still, I half-suspected. I followed. I came too late. You have killed the man. Now——"

"Yes. Now?" the wretch asked breathlessly.

"Now, much—nay, all depends on yourself. I —I have difficulties of my own We all have with

these fools of British at war with Germany. I have plans to carry out. If you——"

"I will do anything," the man gasped eagerly. "Anything."

"Anything?" asked Guggenheimer sternly.

"Anything. Yes. Try me."

"Then come. But wait. We must not be seen together. You have money still?"

"Plenty."

"Then make for the south again. Meet me in Portsmouth at the old address. Here! give me the revolver. Now, placed so in his hand it looks as if he had been tired of life, and had made up his mind to get rid of it. A lucky thing, Schwartz, that your shot struck him in the chest. Such a wound might easily have been self-inflicted."

Swiftly the leader of these two criminals arranged the weapon in the hand of the unfortunate gentleman who had been shot. There was a cunning, cynical smile on his lips as he watched the murderer trembling beside him. Then he patted him gently on the back, told him to cheer up, and dispatched him on his journey.

Anyone who had happened to see this Guggenheimer afterwards as he strolled back to the village would have imagined that he had had the most enjoyable of airings. He was smoking a cigar and beaming with good humour. Not once, but half a dozen times he stopped on his way through the village street to chat with the few shopkeepers, and, happening to meet the constable, entered into

a long and most amiable conversation with him. Indeed, Mr. Stanton, as the villagers knew him, enhanced his popularity wonderfully, and had every reason to feel pleased with his success as he sauntered back to his lodgings. Little did he guess that a man crept after him, that Monsieur Hervey went back to his inn chuckling loudly.

The death of the unfortunate Mr. Thomas Fairleigh was easily understandable by those who knew him. He had always been queer. It was just the sort of ending one might have expected. No one suspected foul play. No one even so much as imagined for an instant that the popular Mr. Stanton could be implicated, or that artist fellow who went sketching daily. Thus the two men slipped away from the village regretted by many, unsuspected by even the most suspicious—Guggenheimer, with all his cleverness, still ignorant that an enemy lurked so near him.

A week later, when Professor Fairleigh was still mourning a brother who had always been eccentric, the town of Portsmouth provided a sensation. The Professor's daughter had suddenly disappeared.

"Eloped," declared many a wiseacre.

But Monsieur Hervey knew. He actually crossed to Germany by way of Holland in the very same boat which bore a Herr van Simmering and his invalid daughter and attendant.

"Scene number two," he smiled, as he watched the water flying past. "Guggenheimer's a marvel. In a little while he'll be at home in Germany, with

only that officer boy between him and a fortune. Wait, though. Only the boy, did I say? Oh no! There's someone else to be considered, I rather think. There's Monsieur Hervey."

The look the ruffian cast at his late confederate was anything but kindly. But then Guggenheimer was blissfully ignorant still of his existence. He himself had fooled people so long and so easily, and had carried off so many disguises that it was quite in the nature of things that he should be fooled also. Those dark-blue glasses hid Monsieur Hervey's glinting eyes and made his face unrecognizable. Besides, he was dead.

"Dead as mutton," the rascal giggled as he watched his enemy. "Dead till we're safely in Germany and the wedding bells are ringing. What a game to be playing!"

CHAPTER XVII

The Turning of the Tide

ONCE again Jim Fletcher landed on the shores of France, the vessel he had taken from a port in England having ploughed her way across the dark waters undisturbed by any incident. The ships of the Navy had seen to that—those restless torpedo destroyers and submarines which day and night patrolled the seas. But this we have to record. Jim had announced his coming, and an official "wire" awaited his arrival:

"Come through by quickest route. Your services needed."

"Needed? Ah! Some little scoop on, eh?" he smiled, as he read the wire. "Come through by quickest route. That wants deciding."

It wanted quite a deal of deciding and investigating, in fact, for there was the railway, there were motor lorries galore, and perhaps, even, he might have been able to hunt out an aeroplane. But Jim was one of those resourceful young men you sometimes meet. He went direct to the French commandant.

"Bon jour, mon Général," he greeted him, salut-

ing with all the smartness of a British officer. "Will you please read that."

"Will I read that? Vraiment. But—will Monsieur le Capitaine kindly say how one is to read and understand what is not understandable to him? This is English, Monsieur. Alas, I do not speak it!"

But Jim was able swiftly to make good the deficiency, and translated the telegram. "If you can help, mon Général," he said, "I shall be deeply obliged."

"Help! Were not the British troops there to stand beside their French brothers? Is it not the duty of such a person as myself to do all that lies in his power? Venez ici, mon Caporal." The general called up a young non-commissioned officer. "Take this to the officer in charge of transport, to Major Latour."

He scribbled a note rapidly and handed it to the corporal. Then, with the native politeness of the French, he offered Jim luncheon—a luncheon which would have opened the eyes of officers at the front, and set the mouths of British Tommies watering to such an extent that if they could but have sniffed the good things placed before Jim even discipline would hardly have restrained them.

"But so it is, Monsieur le Capitaine," the general smiled, as he sipped his cup of coffee. "To each man the luck that the day will bring. Yesterday there was as good a lunch waiting for me. But there was also work. Troops had arrived—your

British Tommies, and there were things to see to. I took petit déjeuner. Then, afterwards——! It was after two this morning when I swallowed a glass of red wine and lay down dressed as I am to snatch a few hours of sleep. No, Monsieur, even at the base, war time is not always so easy and pleasant. Ha! Here comes the Major himself. Mon Majeur, this officer, le Capitaine Fletcher, he will go to the front at once. You will arrange this for him. Perhaps you have done so already?"

Even as they lit their cigarettes a fine touring motor-car was driven to the door of the general's quarters.

"You will be in good hands, mon Capitaine," laughed the major, pointing to the car; "the driver—he is a soldier, you see—is one of our crack racing men. He will take you securely and swiftly —that is, as swiftly as the roads will allow."

The pace at which Jim was whirled out of the town was, in fact, terrific. He didn't mind that, for, as we have intimated before, Jim had no nerves. He didn't smoke too much, and was most abstemious. Then, too, he kept himself as fit as a fiddle, and what more could you ask or expect of a British officer? He was just coolness itself, and so long as his driver took no unnecessary risks—for where was the need at the moment?—he was happy. But one thing Jim did. He learned something about soldiering which had not struck him so forcibly before. He learned how much the front line—the fighting line—depends on those who slave in rear

at the base, on the lines of communication, in a hundred-and-one places and ways. Why, as they raced out of the place to which the ship had brought him, a long hospital train steamed in, and there, in the station, numbers of hospital orderlies were waiting to carry the poor fellows out, and send them up in slings on to the deck of the hospital ship. Farther out, when they had traversed some fifty miles, and had reached a spot where the effective use of the railway was becoming difficult for one reason and another, they came upon convoys of motor-lorries.

"Bizz!" went the hooter to call for a clear road, and was answered by the snap and bark of the exhaust of a motor-cycle. A man came rushing back to them and called upon them to stop. He was a British corporal, a lad who had volunteered his services, and who had had some military training in England. There was no greenness about him either. In his khaki kit, with his bayonet swinging at his belt, his rifle slung over his shoulder, and the revolver which all motor-cyclists carried, he looked a thoroughly business-like and capable young fellow.

"Halt!" he shouted, dropping his machine against a wayside tree. "Passes, please."

Jim showed him the telegram, and the lad saluted.

"Got to hold everyone up, sir," he said apologetically. "Orders."

"Quite right, quite right. Very necessary."

"You'd have said so yesterday, sir," the lad told

him in a flash. "There was a car same as this came rushing up in front of us. I called on them to stop. But they shouted that they had dispatches, and the matter was urgent."

"Ah! Urgent. But you had your orders?"

"There were four of them—officers all," said the corporal, nodding his head. "I pulled out my revolver and put it up. Then one of them leaned over the edge of the car and fired at me. I got him first shot."

This was getting interesting. "Bosches, of course," said Jim.

"Of course, sir; and they'd have got right through if it hadn't been for one of the men of our section. He'd had some magneto trouble, and was following some two hundred yards behind. He just ran his lorry across the road, and that car went into it with a crash. We bagged the lot. They were German officers—spies, dressed in uniforms they had taken from some of our officers. They were shot that evening. Sorry to stop you, sir. Right, sir. You can go on."

The big touring car tore past the lorries steadily parading along the road. There were some fifteen of them in that section, all laden to their fullest, carrying ammunition in this case, and escorted by a couple of motor-cyclists. Ahead were more sections, the lorries laden with flour, with biscuit, with clothing, with bully beef, and with sacks of mail, the letters for which Tommy and his officers were longing.

That evening, after many halts and delays, and having been turned on to side-roads at times—for the traffic was getting much more congested—Jim reached a spot almost immediately behind the British force. By immediately behind, we mean within reach of the force, within sound of the guns. And there it was that he had a further lesson. For there were the Army Service Corps depots, with stacks upon stacks of barrels and boxes of provisions. There were masses of ammunition for every class of gun, engineers' stores, every kind of store that one could imagine—all guarded by sentries, all neatly piled and ticketed, and for the most part being added to in feverish haste from the lorries then arriving.

"Much easier job than it was a week or so ago," an officer whom he knew told him. "Then, when our men were retiring, there was no possibility of massing stores, and we had to do as circumstances dictated. Yes, that's one of the field hospitals. They've taken over a church. There are scores of them all along the line of the Allies."

Jim felt interested, and left the car for a few minutes to cross to the church. At the door he was met by a red-caped hospital sister and invited to enter.

"Looking for one of your men, perhaps?" she asked. "Well, you must excuse me; we are terribly busy. Cases come in almost every minute from the firing-line, and our operating room is practically never empty."

Such a scene as met Jim's eye! Not a scene of disorder, of pain, of misery, but one for the most part of comfort. For comfort it is to a wounded man, who has been badly hurt, to find himself at length with a roof over his head, with water to drink, with skilled assistance near him. As to the sister's remarks, Jim was able to verify them also. A motor-ambulance drove up as he stood at the doorway, and orderlies and a military surgeon pounced upon it. Very gently were the men and officers it contained lifted out and carried into the church. There, rough beds had already been made for them, beds of straw neatly kept together by sheets or blankets, on which the poor fellows were laid. Not that they were miserable. A more cheery band Jim had never met. They were haggard, no doubt, and weary beyond expression. But their wounds had all received some attention already, mostly in the shape of a first field-dressing, the contents of that excellent little packet which each soldier carries stitched in one corner of his tunic. As to pain, few complained of it, for here too the surgeons and their helpers up at the front had taken the necessary steps. A cunning little needle had injected sufficient morphia in the painful cases to drive all pangs away, and now there was merely exhaustion and weariness.

"And so it goes on day and night," one of the surgeons told Jim. "We get full up, and when we begin to grow desperate there arrives a motor-ambulance, which carries on to the rail-head and

the hospital train all the cases that can be safely moved, indeed the majority. Then we begin to fill up again. See that tally? Well, every one of the wounded leaves this place duly ticketed. Then those who see to them on the road home need never fiddle with dressings unnecessarily. Just a glance at the tally tells them the nature of the wound and its location and severity. It also gives instructions as to dressing it. If there's no need, and the man is not in pain, well—on he goes, getting food and drink and every assistance, not to mention something to smoke. But perhaps an arm is throbbing. It's a bandage just a trifle tight maybe. Well, it's detected and loosened. Perhaps it's pain due to a fractured limb. The man on the road, the skilled man, of whom there are scores, looks at the ticket, makes use of his experience, and relief comes from that useful little needle. Yes, we're busy. This is nothing to what it was two days ago. The Germans managed to advance, and shelled us out of our hospital."

Jim could well believe that they were busy. From what he had seen on his way up from the base, he could realize now, better perhaps than he had ever done before, that war calls for a great deal more than fighting. Not that the latter could be ignored. Indeed, first and foremost let due praise be given to him who stands shoulder to shoulder with his comrades, to officer and man, to the ranks of the army facing and holding the enemy. But recollect those others, the long string of helpers behind the

front line, the men who keep things going for their gallant and wounded comrades.

Nor must one forget that the carrying on of war entails efforts, stupendous efforts often enough, on others besides those engaged in the country where war is being waged. For—to take the case of this terrific conflict in which Jim, like thousands of his fellows, was now engaged — at home, in London itself, quite an army of officers and men must work at high pressure to arrange for the sending of reinforcements, for the constant dispatch of stores and supplies, for dealing with the numbers of sick and wounded almost constantly arriving, and last—but by no means least—must recruit and recruit and recruit for that gigantic army which Great Britain was to put into the field. There is no limit, indeed, to the length to which one could draw out the description.

Our public parks and a hundred and more camps placed about the country displayed at that very moment companies of recruits still as yet in their civilian garb—for the army clothing factories had not yet been able to cope with the sudden demand for uniforms—eager, fine young fellows drilling all day, preparing to face the Germans, drilling under the eyes of numbers of ex-non-commissioned officers whom the call for trained men and patriotism had brought back to the army in a willing stream. Then carry the matter further, to overseas, to the colonies and dependencies, to the Indian Empire, to every mile over which the grand old Union Jack

flies. Everywhere men as busy as bees, working, striving, making ready to meet the Kaiser's host, to teach Germany that might is not right, and that Britain was now as ever true to her smaller and weaker friends, and, better than all, true to herself.

Jim's car whizzed its way amid a medley of motor-lorries, enormous steam-tractors, columns of ammunition wagons, and a host of other vehicles to the rear of the fighting forces. The incessant din of artillery in action told him that he was drawing near to his old comrades, and very soon he was able to locate some of our batteries. Then he halted to make enquiries of a French officer.

"Ah, yes! Monsieur le Capitaine, the British force. You wish to rejoin? Wounded, perhaps?"

The smart gunner officer had drawn himself up stiffly at attention, and beamed now as Jim addressed him in French. Then, not to be outdone, he replied in English, though not of the best:

"Ah yes! Well, your comrades, they are away to the left, yes, and beyond them again our men are posted, a brigade and more. Have we been fighting? Mon dieu!" He lifted his hands and then laughed, laughed loudly, though there was an absence of merriment in the tones. "I will tell you, Monsieur. But wait, you have been long away?"

"We were retiring from Mons, and had been for some days," Jim answered. "I'm in the Flying Corps, and managed to get into a cavalry charge."

"A cavalry charge! That is strange for an

officer of the Flying Corps. You are mounted on a horse instead of on an aeroplane?"

"Yes, Monsieur," Jim told him with a grin, for the Frenchman was vastly interested. "I was out for change of air and scene."

"Pardieu! Out for change of air and scene!" The lieutenant laughed uproariously. "Of a truth, Monsieur le Capitaine, you British, you really are —well, you take a man's breath away. You, an airman, who have enough dangers as it is, you join the troops down below and mount a horse. Bien! Tell me more."

Jim shrugged his shoulders. Still, though he hated telling of his own exploits, politeness bade him give the desired information. "Got mixed up with the cavalry somehow," he said, coolly enough; "charged right home with them and took some guns. Got thrown, and—well, for a while that was the end of the matter. Then three of the troopers and myself managed to get through the enemy to the coast. I went aboard a destroyer, and there, as luck would have it, I got into another mess. You see——"

The lieutenant was vastly amused. He was doubled up with merriment. Not that he was wishing to belittle Jim's adventures. No; it wasn't that. It tickled him immensely to listen to this—as he thought—cold, stoical Britisher. The naïve, half-shamefaced way in which Jim gave the yarn was really too delicious. But it was British.

"Like the rest of them," he muttered. "How

little we have understood our allies till now! We wondered if Britain would come in to help us. If we had known them really we should have been sure that she would stand by her word and honour. And here is one telling me lamely, as if I were his superior, of adventures which I would give a year's pay to have taken a part in. Bien, Monsieur, what next? A naval engagement?"

"Heligoland," Jim nodded.

"Heligoland! You were in that! Ah, what luck! But I see you are in a hurry. Au revoir, Monsieur le Capitaine. Keep the road to the right, and when you see the Turcos you will know that your own men lie just to their left."

They saluted and the car sped on, leaving the Frenchman watching Jim's retreating figure. "Brave comrades!" he was saying. "With them to help, with the bravery of France at the front, surely we must win. We will win. The stake is huge. How can a son of France return till the enemy is entirely crushed!"

He rejoined the battery, sheltering and resting behind a knoll, and swung himself on to his horse. Then he led the guns out, and the clatter of his pieces was soon added to the general din of the battle. Each shell that was fired carried the best wishes of that lieutenant.

As for Jim, he went on steadily, but more slowly now. Occasionally a badly-aimed shell fell in the direction of the car, and once they nearly came to grief because of one of these missiles, which had

struck the hard road and wrecked it. For the rest, bullets sped by a little later, while everything indicated that the retreat had terminated. For there were collecting-stations immediately in rear of invisible trenches, stations which were sheltered by banks of knolls or even by houses, though the latter offered uncertain shelter, seeing that German guns had a way of firing on them. Here and there were dead horses and dead men. A motor-lorry, of German manufacture, was upset at the side of the road, and near it lay almost a dozen Germans, still and cold.

"What's happened?" Jim asked abruptly of a staff officer galloping past.

"Happened! Halloo, that you, Fletcher! Well, we've got 'em well on the run. We're driving the Germans over the Marne. The retreat's ended. The tide has turned, my boy. We're letting 'em have a bit of their own back, with just a bit to spare."

Jim could see the change even in the faces of the battalion cooks, as he passed the sheltered spot in which their fires were blazing. Honest fellows, they were only too delighted to be of use; for during that terribly hard and rapid retreat they had scarcely lighted a fire, much less had time to cook anything. Here they were following. The Germans were moving back. The boys down there in the firing-line were "giving them fits".

"Going to charge 'em very soon, Monsieur," said the officer commanding a section of the Turcos,

whom Jim now joined. "All along the line of Allies we're pressing."

The man looked askance at Jim out of yellow-grey eyes. They were big eyes, which were of abnormal size, and shone and gleamed from a face of olive complexion. Jim noticed that the hair was close and curling, and a little black. Obviously this was a half-breed. And the men he commanded? Well, they drew an exclamation of delight from our hero.

"Well set up. Sturdy and plucky beggars," he thought. "And they're getting ready for a charge. Well, I've my own unit to find."

But as he went off at a tangent in search of the British force, Jim saw a sight which was now of daily occurrence. The fire of the artillery had become simply deafening. Those Turcos and their white brothers were creeping across open ground, nearer and nearer the retreating Germans. And then — there was a frantic, long-drawn-out yell. The Turcos were at their enemy, with blazing eyes and deadly bayonets.

"And so it is everywhere," he was told. "All along the hundred or more miles the Allies are pressing their attacks home. The enemy is in hasty retreat, and we are capturing guns and stores and prisoners."

It was all true enough. Those desperate days of constant retreat, those hours when the left flank of the Allies might have been enveloped at any moment—they were gone. The tide had turned.

General Joffre had at length tempted the enemy—an over-confident enemy—far from their base; and now at a sign the whole long line—the whole million or more of French and British troops—had turned and were even then driving hard at the Germans, driving at them with might and main, smashing their ranks and teaching them a lesson.

Jim took off his cap and drew his fingers through his hair. He felt younger, stronger, fitter, and happier than ever.

"Thank God!" he said aloud. "At last the tide has turned. Now we'll go forward."

As for the chauffeur, that crack motor racer who had convoyed him from the base, he looked back at the British officer, smiled, and at a signal their hands met in a firm grip, the grip of a brave Frenchman and a brave Britisher.

"Forward, Monsieur, yes," he said. "Forward to Berlin, there to present a bill for all the butchery in Belgium, for all the ruin these Bosches have brought to France and England. To Berlin then, Monsieur!"

CHAPTER XVIII

Raiding the Enemy

"'COME through by quickest route. Your services needed.' Wonder what for?" said Jim, as the car in which he had been brought up from the base arrived in rear of the British position. He had spent a whole afternoon and evening on the journey, and had been compelled to sleep the night just in rear of those Turcos. "Hi there! Know where the Flying Corps's headquarters are located?"

He had called to one of the Army Service Corps hastening along in rear of the rain of shells plunging from German guns. The man halted and saluted.

"Flying Corps, sir? Yes, sir. A little farther on. Well back from the shells. You'll see their wagons in a little."

Once more Jim proceeded, while still he looked at that telegram. That it meant something out of the ordinary he was sure, for there were numbers of army aviators at the front who would be able to carry out ordinary duties. Indeed, let us say, there were few who could not have carried out any duties

issued by the senior officer. But where dash was wanted, well——!

"You wire off for that fellow Fletcher," a staff officer had been told. "He's our man for the job I have in hand. Where to goodness he's got these last few days I'm sure I can't say. They tell me he reported to one of the brigadiers and then went into the trenches. That's not an action to be repeated. We can't afford to lose our officers; they're wanted badly."

He might have added that every one of his officers was engaged every day and almost all day long. For if this huge campaign had lasted only a matter of a few weeks now, it had entailed continuous fighting, and had seen aeroplanes in the air constantly, overlooking the enemy's position. And this fact had come out of those strenuous days of flight. The British aviators man for man had proved themselves, like those gallant soldiers of ours in the trenches or on horseback, more than a match for the Germans. Taubes still floated over our lines, but not so frequently, for the British aviators had a disagreeable way of giving chase. They had developed the annoying habit of launching their machines as soon as a German Taube appeared, and of dogging its flight. They had fired their revolvers at close range, too, and more than one German had been sent crashing to the ground. Indeed, chasing German aeroplanes had become a sport almost of daily occurrence. But Jim was wanted for something else. He re-

ported his arrival within a few minutes of questioning the A.S.C. man, and stood at attention awaiting orders.

"Services needed, sir," he reminded his chief. "Came by the very quickest route. Regret absence from the corps, but——"

"Couldn't help it, eh, Fletcher? Tell us all about it. You went into the trenches——"

"Yes, sir."

"And got hung up and surrounded. Had to make for the coast, and it took time to get round to the port where you got my wire?"

Jim nodded, and told his tale in a few words, causing some of his brother officers who happened to be present to turn dusky red with envy. Even his commanding officer gave vent to a whistle.

"You're the luckiest dog I've ever come upon, Fletcher," he told him, gripping his arm in friendly manner. "But come into my quarters. I've something I wish to say, something confidential. Not, of course," he explained, "that I don't trust all my officers. But, then, this happens to be—er—well, very confidential."

He led the way amongst the huge motor-lorries and the cars attached to the aeroplane corps, to where a lorry more gigantic than the rest stood. A stretch of tarpaulin had been secured to the wagon and then run over a stout pole supported on two others and roped to the ground. Within, a few boxes did service for seats, while the officer's bed was rolled in one corner. There was a field

telephone hanging to its box, while from the adjacent car came the sound of metal being worked in a heavy lathe, as well as the rasp of a file. Indeed, this lorry was one of the travelling workshops which saw to the numerous engineering repairs to be expected with a flight of aeroplanes. As to the cars, they were told off to the aeroplanes, and carried spares of every sort and description. Jim sat down on one of the boxes at a nod from his chief.

"I've chosen you for a special task, Fletcher," he heard. "You—er—it's risky."

"Yes, sir."

"I mean, far more so than flying is in general. You—er—I—well, of course——"

Jim saw his meaning in a moment, and came at once to the rescue.

"If you'll allow me, sir," he said smoothly, "I'd like to volunteer."

"Thanks! Thanks, Fletcher! I'm obliged," came the answer. The commandant indeed smothered a sigh. He knew the work he wanted carried out was extremely risky. It involved possible, indeed likely, capture. Added to that were other risks, the danger to be anticipated by an exasperated people. Jim's happy tact was a wonderful help. He looked the young officer over thoroughly and smiled. "Have a cigarette," he said; and then, *sotto voce*, "Jim Fletcher's just my man. Dashing, yet cool. Brave, yet thoughtful. And speaks German like a native."

"Yes, sir," said Jim, when the silence had lasted for half a second and both were puffing at their cigarettes. "Thank you for allowing me to volunteer! What is the duty?"

"This. News has filtered through—never mind how, or from what source; but seeing that you were with the Intelligence Department you will be able to make a good guess—news has come to us that Germany is making huge efforts to get an air fleet ready in the neighbourhood of Cologne. London is the supposed objective. Well, we wish to know more. It's a very long flight from here, and you will have to go via Belgium. There you have to pick up petrol and oil. After that you must subsist on the enemy."

"Quite so, sir. And full information is required?"

"Certainly. You have been chosen partly—only partly, let me say—because you speak the language and were once in the Intelligence."

"And supposing I have the opportunity," said Jim, "am I to destroy whatever the Germans are doing?"

The officer smiled at Jim and then laughed outright. "This is an independent command," he said. "You will take a junior with you, and—er—perhaps you will ask for bombs. The rest will be in your hands entirely, though I hardly need say to you that the honour of the Flying Corps rests in your hands. Now, pick your man, and go when you are ready. The matter is urgent."

Jim went off to the open-air quarters of the corps and chatted for a while with his comrades. He found it difficult to decide which of them to invite to accompany him. He looked them up and down.

"Fine fellows. Keen as mustard," he told himself. "I say," he said aloud, "I've been given a job, and shall want a fellow with me. It's important work, er—don't you know, and—well—the fellow who comes is more likely to find himself inside a German prison within a few hours than back here amongst you; or he may be potted. That's very likely. Anyone keen?"

They came at him as one man. Keen! They would all come with him. Jim had, indeed, added to his labours. However, the friendly commandant came to his aid, and Flight-Lieutenant Mercer was selected. That young fellow flushed to the roots of his hair with pleasure, and at once made ready.

"When do we start?" he asked.

"Now. We'll have a good square meal first, and make a few additions to my machine. Then we'll take in certain stores and arms and be off. The evenings are still long, and we should be able to make our first stage easily. I'll tell you later on what the job is."

They went to the aeroplane which Jim was accustomed to fly, and gave certain instructions. For Jim had been thinking over this coming adventure. A whispered word to his mechanic, an appeal to the mechanic in charge of the repair lorry, and he was satisfied.

"Now we'll eat, Mercer," he told his friend, "and talk. Our job is to look for German efforts in the airship- and aeroplane-building line in the neighbourhood of Cologne. We shall have to land somewhere near there, and one of us must get back with the information. Now I——"

"Cologne? Invading the enemy's country? Ripping!" came in enthusiastic tones from Mercer. "Then——?"

"We'll see what happens," Jim told him. "Of course, our aim will be to smash whatever they are up to and get back here somehow. But to get our information we must land, and a landing during daylight will set the whole country on us."

"Just so. You'll risk a descent at night? Why not? Of course, the machine might suffer. But, then, if the Germans have others there, why—well—you never know, do you?" The youngster was grinning. "It'll make 'em wild to clear off with one of theirs," he laughed.

"As to landing," said Jim thoughtfully, "I've no desire to make a mess of things. I've told 'em to take that electric-lighting set off one of the cars and fit it. Switched on just before we land, it would show us the lie of the ground and wouldn't attract so much attention. If we break up, why, then, Mercer, my boy, we'll do as circumstances direct. But if Germany is making efforts, I give you my word I don't return till we've had a say in the matter. You're game?"

"Try me!" cried the youth eagerly.

"I will. Now, stow as much grub away as you can, and let's be going."

There was quite a little flutter of excitement in the camp as the mechanics wheeled Jim's machine out. The few stores they were able to take were placed on board, and the bombs which Jim had commissioned were gingerly hung at the right hand, where his assistant could operate them.

"Good luck, Fletcher and Mercer!" sang out their commandant, as the propeller was swung. "Good luck!" roared the other officers. Then the hundred-horse-power Gnome roared and hummed, shaking the fusillage of the machine. Jim pulled his goggles into position, pushed the mouthpiece of the telephone leading to Mercer's ear a little higher, and glanced at his revolution-counter.

"Doing eight hundred," he called. "Let her go!"

Up went his hand in the accustomed signal, and at once the mechanics restraining the machine fell back.

"She's off!" shouted Mercer. "Hooray!"

They shot along the ground. In three lengths of this fleet monoplane they were on the wind, and then away they soared. How Jim gloated over that swift, smooth flight! How the daring young officer behind him laughed his delight! The tones of his voice smote through the telephone-receiver upon Jim's ears till he turned his head and scowled at the offender. Banking steeply, he ascended spirally directly over the British lines till he was

four thousand feet up. Then he looked at his compass, and, steering towards the north and then east, took a line which brought him over the very hottest part of the fighting. For, bear in mind, this gigantic battle of the Marne was not a thing of a few hours, but one of days. It was a hundred-mile battle, with Germans retreating opposite the British, supported on the left by French forces; with a more gradual retirement of the enemy as the centre was reached; and a contest elsewhere in which one side or the other gained and lost ground alternately—where for some miles, but for the thunder of guns, there was little action, while in other parts, maybe closely adjacent, murderous assaults were taking place and men were engaged in bloody hand-to-hand combats. And yet this battle of the Marne was but child's-play as compared with that which was to follow, the Battle of the Aisne, where the Germans had retreated to prepared positions. Week after week the contest continued with slight ebb and flow. Think of it! Weeks of incessant fighting, continued bombardment of entrenched positions, fighting along that hundred miles or more, often in drenching rain and with trenches filled with water.

But Jim and his comrade had no time for watching the Battle of the Marne, though they observed that the French were heavily assailing the German right wing, threatening to envelop it even as the Germans had attempted to envelop the left wing of the Allies when the British were retiring

so precipitately from Mons. This other fact they learned. In spite of the deadly nature of the British fire during that retreat, and their stubborn courage, General von Kluck, the commander of the German army on their right, chose at this stage of the battle of the Marne to treat the British force as of no more use. Imagining that its losses, which had been heavy, and its fatigue must have destroyed the fighting value of the force, he marched his army across the front of our divisions in the hope of crushing the French. And bitterly did he pay for his temerity.

Some hours after leaving their camp, Jim and his friend planed down to a lower altitude and scooped over the city of Brussels. Then, discovering it to be garrisoned by Germans, they turned off and flew direct to Antwerp, where they dropped to the ground and passed the night.

"And now comes the time to use discretion," said Jim, when they had breakfasted on the morrow. "Four hours should take us to Cologne."

"Just about, if she comes along as she has done so far," agreed his comrade.

"Then we'll have a look round the machine and get going just before the evening comes. Just a word, Mercer. If anyone is curious, just say we're here for our health."

That set the subaltern grinning. "For our health! Yes, sir," he laughed, "for ours and the Kaiser's."

No doubt there were many spies left in Antwerp;

and as a matter of fact the coming of this British aeroplane had led to speculation amongst them. But the wretches who would have sent information to the enemy could but guess, for a guard kept all and sundry at a distance from the machine and the officers who had come in it. Consequently none were the wiser when, as dusk was falling, the two clambered into their seats and got away. Jim headed the aeroplane in a southerly direction.

"Make 'em all think we're going back home," he shouted. "We shall be out of sight and hearing in ten minutes, when we'll take a bee-line for Cologne."

It was weird up there amongst the dark clouds, with an occasional view of lights below. Not that the towns and cities of unfortunate Belgium were brilliant with lamps at this stage of the war. The German vandal had stamped them out long ago, and with them the lives and the houses of the defenceless population. But in Germany itself, as the hours went by, and they flew over the Fatherland, Jim and his comrade found a different state of affairs. No fear of invasion was yet in the minds of the people. They had gloated over the sufferings of French and Belgians; and here they were too far from Eastern Prussia to catch an echo of the lamentations of their country people there who were being defeated by the Russians. In a little while it would be different: now, it was quite as it should be that Zeppelins should take the lives

of women and children by dropping bombs on foreign cities. Cologne itself was a blaze of lights.

"Could drop into the centre as easy as wink," Jim shouted.

"Then why not?" his comrade called back. Indeed, Flight-Lieutenant Mercer was ready for anything. He had a huge trust in Jim, and for the rest he was as reckless and devil-may-care a fellow as Dicky Dance. "Why not? Give 'em fits, eh?"

But Jim was an old and a cautious hand.

"Hold on!" he shouted. "I'm going to fly low and hunt for woods. We'll drop down here well outside the city, and at the first streak of dawn we'll get aloft again and seek for cover."

He had cut his engine out some distance from the city, and though he sailed right over the roofs, it was at a considerable height, and not one of the comfortable citizens even dreamed that an enemy's aeroplane was near. Had they done so there would have been a panic in Cologne that night. Planing downward now, he scooped away to the east, descending till he imagined he must be near the ground. Then, with his finger on the switch, he sent a glare of electric light flashing from the headlights he had had fitted.

"Hold on! Nearly into that tree. Didn't know we were so low."

"Miss as good as a mile," he heard his subaltern shout back joyfully. "Try again, sir."

Jim did. Just a flash of the lamps, a rapid scrutiny of his immediate surroundings, and then darkness again.

"Good!" he called. "All clear. Make ready for landing."

He switched his lamps on again as they approached the ground, and with their help managed to bring his wheels to earth with tolerable precision. Lieutenant Mercer then leaped from the machine, and in a couple of minutes they were stationary. They had landed in a wide field, in fact, with a bank of trees all round them. So far they had been extraordinarily lucky, and seeing that they could do no more they ate a hearty meal, refilled their petrol tank with the spare cans they carried, and then smoked.

"You have a sleep," Jim said. "I'll smoke for a couple of hours. Then I'll take a turn. By then it'll be time to think of moving."

The dawn was just breaking when they stirred on the following day, and looked about them curiously if a little anxiously. Then they smiled at one another.

"Fine!" declared the subaltern. "Could hardly have done it better in day-time. What next?"

"Shove her along well in under the trees. Then have a bite. I'll change into my travelling kit immediately afterwards and leave you in charge. Should advise you to make a hollow somewhere, or perhaps a nest in one of the trees. If anyone comes along, stay quiet, for they will have to go

and report. By then you'll have been able to start her up and get away."

"And if I do?" asked his comrade.

"Then land elsewhere if you can. Hang round for a bit and look out for my signal. If you don't see it, presume that I'm—well, presume anything."

"Yes, sir," said Mercer, looking at him queerly.

"Then cut. Leave me to fend for myself."

"Not if I know it," came the *sotto voce* answer. Lieutenant Mercer had his own ideas on that matter. However, it wasn't the time for arguments; and so he watched Jim strip his uniform off and dress in the clothes of a German non-commissioned officer. Then, wishing him luck, he scrambled into a tree and began to smoke in a fashion which showed in some measure that this gallant young fellow was not above the effects of excitement.

Jim went off boldly, and that afternoon strolled into the city of Cologne. And there he soon made for a cabaret and seated himself at a table.

"Beer. Yes. A big mug of it." He drank it down like a true son of the Fatherland.

"More. Pah! Those pigs of Englishmen have made me thirsty. Can they fight? Himmel! Yes, where children are concerned. But with us, with men, of a certainty no."

The fat old innkeeper rubbed his hands. Hearing such a sorry account of the British, he almost felt regrets that age and increasing weight prevented his serving his beloved Fatherland. He

would have loved to fire a shot at the pigs of British.

"And those French. Pooh!" he said. "We shall brush them back. Already we are almost in Paris."

Jim looked up at the man from behind his paper. He took another pull at his mug of beer.

"Almost. Say on the very ramparts. Our aeroplanes are already above the city. We are treating them to a taste of what Antwerp was given."

That set the fat one laughing till his sides shook. "They will fly like sheep," he cried. "But wait, wait——" He put an artful finger to the side of his nose. "Himmel! Just wait."

Jim took another pull. What was he to wait for? he demanded.

"You have not heard?"

"Heard! How does a man at the front hear anything, then?"

"It is this." The man leaned over him and whispered. "At—well, you know where the Zeppelins are stored; there they are building more. They are rushing aeroplanes through. And soon, very soon, my friend, London will be paid a visit. He! he! That is good, eh?"

Suddenly he stopped and backed away. People were passing. Jim lifted his mug and drank. Over the top of the huge rim he watched the passers, for he sat outside the inn, as is the custom on the Continent. Two men were sauntering by, both tall,

and one decidedly lanky. They were engaged in deep conversation, and hardly even glanced at him.

"That is good, eh? To London. A visit to London," the innkeeper was whispering in his ear, careless now that the strangers had passed.

Jim nodded violently, and of a sudden again immersed his face in the mug. For another man was passing, a shorter man, one who wore blue glasses, who seemed to be following those others. And just at that moment he saw fit to remove and wipe his glasses. Jim gulped. He knew the man.

"But—but he is dead," he murmured half-aloud.

"Dead! He is! Who?" demanded the innkeeper.

"Shot in Brussels. I——" suddenly Jim realized the need of caution. "Pardon," he said. "It is my head. I had a sunstroke during the fighting, and beer upsets me. There! I will have no more of it. Confound those British! I hope their London may be blown to pieces."

He paid his score and went away, leaving the man chuckling. Then Jim slowly followed the man who had removed his blue glasses. There was not the smallest doubt that he too was following those others. Had Jim recognized them? No: though if one of the scoundrels had been lame and had crawled along, our hero would have known him in an instant. But in Germany the notorious Guggenheimer was safe—at least, secure from all but Monsieur Hervey. Why, then, simulate a

lameness which it required a deal of effort to keep up? As to Schwartz, well, he was useful at the moment. Later on, he could be got out of the way, and, after all, he had merely penetrated one of the numerous disguises of his rascally employer.

Thus Guggenheimer and Schwartz strolled on their way, with Monsieur Hervey chuckling and in fine humour behind them. In rear came Jim, very much troubled, very doubtful whether to follow at all or to return at once to join his comrade. For now he knew where those new air-ships were building. He knew, and the remedy for them hung at the side of the aeroplane.

It is just the simple little things which often enough bring big changes in our lives. Guggenheimer stopped and produced a latch-key. He approached a door and inserted the key, bidding Schwartz to follow. And just over his head as he entered there appeared a figure, the figure of a girl, a girl whose fresh and dainty beauty even at that distance caught Jim's eye and arrested his attention.

"Jingo!" he cried beneath his breath. "She in there! Gladys Fairleigh! There's something strange about all this business."

CHAPTER XIX

A Rascally Plot Foiled

HIDDEN behind a convenient wall which happened to be opposite the house into which Guggenheimer had disappeared, Jim Fletcher closely peered at the fast-shut door, at the shuttered window. And as he watched the place, that Monsieur Hervey, the spy whom he imagined to have long ago expiated his crimes before a sergeant's guard in Brussels, crouched to the farther side, his head and shoulders now and again appearing.

"Gladys Fairleigh in there, in that house! Why?" Jim asked himself. "And, outside, Monsieur Hervey, a man who should be dead. I—I don't understand. I can't make up my mind how to act. The nation's business takes precedence of everything; and yet—and yet, if she is there against her will, as I think must be the case, then the nation would expect me to attempt her rescue."

There was a clatter over the way. That shuttered window at which he had caught a glimpse of the girl, and which had been closed while he was manœuvring into position, opened with a crash.

The window itself was thrust outward on its hinges, and a piercing shriek awoke the echoes. Indeed, it would have called the citizens of Cologne together, only Guggenheimer, the brute, the schemer, had foreseen such incidents. He had not taken his captive into the city. No; he had dragged her to a house on its outskirts, as lonely a place as well could be found, for it lay even beyond the cabaret standing on the very fringe of the city. And at this very instant he stood at the open door of the room in which his prisoner had been placed, and smiled, smiled sardonically, with an air of triumph which caused his features to wear a diabolical appearance. Yes, when Guggenheimer felt triumphant, when he had attained the upper hand, then those who had been worsted had need to tremble. For the man's beady eyes were more than half-hidden. Yet they gleamed and shone in a manner which had to be seen to be fully appreciated. The face, too, was wreathed in an expansive smile—a smile which cut deep furrows into the cheeks, and drew the heavily-moustached lip far away from the lower. Then it was that the victim saw teeth—sharp, closely-clenched teeth which gritted together, saw the whole hitherto, hidden hideousness of this wretch's countenance.

Gladys Fairleigh shrieked again, and then, having heard the door open, turned to stare at the intruder.

"You!" she cried. "You!"

"Yes, none other, my dear lady," he answered

smoothly enough, still smiling that smile of triumph. "Maurice Mervin, at your service. But——"

"But what?" she asked, cowering away from the man as he stepped nearer.

"But, do not distress yourself. Something has frightened you. You shrieked."

"For help, if there is such a thing to be found in this terrible Germany," she cried. "For a friend to deliver me from you and that other ruffian. Can you not pity, can you not spare me?" she begged, sobbing and burying her face in her hands. "I—I am alone. I——"

"Alone? No, Miss Gladys, not alone," he corrected her calmly, with that horrible, oily smoothness of which he was the master, with the glib tongue of the liar and bully that he was. "Not alone, Miss Gladys. For I am here, your friend."

"Friend!" she blazed out at him. "Friend!"

"Yes, friend at this moment," he told her. "But to-morrow—well, to-morrow even more than friend."

She started and looked at him as a startled deer might at a hunter. The colour fled from her cheeks, leaving her deadly pale, while her breath came in short, deep gasps.

"More than friend! What do you mean?" she asked him desperately.

"Mean?" Guggenheimer smiled placidly. "Mean, Miss Gladys? Why, is not a husband entitled to consider himself more than friend to his wife?"

"A husband! You mean——?"

"That to-morrow is our wedding day. Your father wished it. I but carry out his commands."

Poor Gladys Fairleigh! She groaned as she recollected that her foolish, half-childish father had actually expressed that wish. But she was no cypher. She was no woman to allow even a father to hand her to one she loathed. And she loathed this Guggenheimer, this Maurice Mervin as he called himself. Ah, how she hated the man—spy, traitor, brute, everything! He was beneath contempt. He—he was in command of the situation. She was his prisoner. She was helpless. No one had responded to that call for help. Can one wonder that the poor girl broke down under the strain of such an affliction and wept? And this odious wretch left her weeping.

"Till to-morrow, at noon," he said smoothly. "Please rest now, and do not call again. It is useless. The neighbourhood is deserted, and, besides, people do not interfere with others' business nowadays. Rest, Miss Gladys."

Jim gripped the edge of the wall, gripped it till the blood fled from his straining fingers. He had seen the girl come to the window and then retreat. He had heard that frantic appeal for help, and later had seen the open window drawn to by a man, who he guessed must be one of those that had entered the building. Who was the fellow? He imagined he knew the face. But—what did it matter who he

was? He was a rascal in any case; and above all, beyond all else, here, quite close at hand, was a countrywoman in distress, one whom he had rescued earlier. Jim wasn't a soft-hearted fellow. He merely admired Gladys Fairleigh as any other man might have admired a handsome girl in all the freshness of her youth. It was true enough, too, that her courage had attracted him wonderfully. But there—well, he believed that the matter had ended at that point. It was war time—not the time for thinking of anything beyond his profession.

"Still, it's strange that I should be the one to find her in danger for the second time, and in Germany again. In Germany again," he repeated. "In Germany. That reminds me. She wrote, wrote after that little adventure she and Dicky and I took part in, and told how she believed that a man named Maurice Mervin, a lame lodger at their house, had prevailed on her father to send her to Berlin. I knew he was a scoundrel even then. I knew it even more when he slipped away in Brussels after denouncing that Monsieur Hervey. Good Lord! Monsieur Hervey! That's the fellow I followed, the fellow over there. What's the meaning of all this business?"

Jim was a smart fellow. He could see through a brick wall, as the saying goes, as far as most people. But he was slow to detect rascality, to saddle his fellow-man with the brand of spy. He dealt himself in open-handed methods, not in duplicity and cunning, in crawling subterfuge, in

lying and bluff, the armament of such men as Guggenheimer and his accomplices. Yet this coming together of Gladys Fairleigh and Guggenheimer must be more than coincidence. Then what, also, had brought Monsieur Hervey to the neighbourhood? What set him sneaking after Guggenheimer and that lanky companion of his? What had he to do with the girl who had shrieked from the window, with Guggenheimer also?

"Beats me hollow. But I'll bet they're up to some rascally game. Three of 'em, eh? And one against the other two. Well, they're all bad lots, and precisely what they're up to I haven't time to think. I've got to rescue the girl. I'll—I'll walk into the house and give 'em a taste of this."

His hand was on his revolver now, and he drew it from beneath his coat. He placed a hand on the top of the wall and made ready to vault over. Then he suddenly drew back. For the figure crouching on the ground at the far side of the house—Monsieur Hervey to be exact—was crawling forward. He crept to the corner of the lonely house and looked this way and that. He peered at the window above and then at the door. He even crept to the latter and endeavoured to push it open.

"Locked. Couldn't be better. Now all depends on the girl. If she's—well, if she's a fool she'll trust me, take me for a friend. If she's not, there'll be a commotion. All the better," Monsieur Hervey told himself, as he felt the two revolvers hanging to

his belt. "All the better for me. All the worse for dear Guggenheimer. Yes, all the worse for him. I hope it'll turn out like that, for I'd like to have done with the brute before my wedding. Wedding! Ho! it makes a man smile. Wedding indeed! I, Fritz Hervey, to be married, to take the place of our dear friend Maurice Mervin!"

He crept away towards the back of the house, and Jim again made ready to leap over the wall. Then he hurriedly crouched once more and hid himself behind cover. For Hervey was staggering forward with a ladder, staggering from behind the lonely house. With an effort, for it was a heavy affair, he erected it against the front, and manœuvred it against the ledge of the window which had been thrown open. Then, with a last glance around, he scrambled up, two rungs at a time. Jim saw him break the window open with some instrument and enter the room. He waited, expecting to hear screams, and prepared to dash forward. Then he saw Hervey's figure again, and beyond him that of Gladys. She clambered down the ladder without hesitation, and they went off along the lonely street in the direction of the open country.

"Well, I'm hanged!" Jim was perplexed, and no wonder. But if he could have heard the smooth-tongued Monsieur Hervey he would not have been so puzzled. Entering that room above, he had called gently to the girl to be silent.

"Hush!" he called. "I—I am a friend. I have come for others."

"For others?" She looked at him doubtfully, half-inclined to call for help from the odious Guggenheimer. But to give Hervey full credit, his features were hardly stamped with the mark of rascality as were those of Guggenheimer. When he liked, this plausible, stout little Teuton could actually beam and look as mild as possible. His countenance shone with compassion, with pity, and with hope as Gladys stared at him.

"For others, yes," he said. "Listen! You were taken away from Portsmouth, from the Professor. He could not follow. But I could—I and those others."

"Who? What others? Their names?" she asked hysterically, for the relief was almost too great.

"Who? Ah, no names here, Mademoiselle," he told her with that mild smile of his. "But two officers, a soldier and a sailor."

The colour swirled to her pale cheeks. She rocked and clung to the frame of the window.

"Two—officers—a soldier and a sailor."

"Yes. Waiting beyond there. I have a car to take you to them. Come, now, without waiting."

She snatched a hat and a tiny bag, and stepped to the window.

"Lead the way," she told him bravely, "I will come. On your honour, two British officers are waiting to take me out of Germany?"

"On my honour," the brute told her.

"Then go."

Monsieur Hervey slid down that ladder with anything but a mild expression on his face. His eyes were dancing with excitement, with triumph. Of a sudden he realized that he was at the end of all his plotting, about to revenge himself on the wretch who had once denounced him. Ah! how it made him gasp as he thought of his triumph, of his success, of Guggenheimer's fury and despair when he found that the bird he had caged had been snared by another.

"To the car, Mademoiselle," he whispered as she reached the road. "Let me carry the bag. In a little while, in a matter of half an hour, we shall meet those officers. Then——"

"Yes, then?" she asked him breathlessly.

"England, Mademoiselle. What more, who knows?"

There was an enigmatical smile on his face. Yet he still managed to display for her that mild expression. The girl glanced swiftly at him and hesitated. Something warned her to distrust this smooth-faced, smiling Teuton. But what else could she do? Hurry into the city of Cologne? Shriek for help again?

"Mademoiselle," he said, interrupting her, "here is the car. Enter."

"And you?" she asked.

"I shall drive. There is no chauffeur. It was not safe to bring one. The officers even did not dare. Enter, Mademoiselle, and let us get away from that villain."

She stepped hesitatingly into the vehicle and sat down, while Monsieur Hervey went to the starting-handle. But his face bore anything but a mild expression when he discovered that something was amiss and that the engine refused to start.

"Himmel!" he growled beneath his breath. "But this is awkward. That Guggenheimer may discover his loss at any moment, and then there will be a flare-up. Inside the house, out of sight of people, I would not mind. But here, here in the open, it would be awkward. Himmel! The engine refuses to start. What a fool I was, not to bring a man with me!"

He opened the bonnet and looked in. But Monsieur Hervey was not a mechanic. He was decidedly more of a rascal than anything else, and if he excelled in anything at all it was in conspiracy and spying, as in the case of Guggenheimer. A petrol engine was an enigma to him. Levers and rods and carburettors and so forth had always been out of his province, things not understandable. Then how was he to set the engine going and carry out his plans as he had hoped?

"Bah! I—— Hi!" he shouted.

A man was strolling across the street. He had come from one of the houses over the road and appeared to be a soldier. "Hi!" shouted Monsieur Hervey eagerly.

The soldier stared at him, drew himself to his full height, and walked on arrogantly. Was a soldier, a man in uniform, to be bawled at as if he were a

dog? Bah! That, at least, was the impression this man gave. He tossed his head and went on, ignoring Monsieur Hervey.

"My friend, help me," the latter shouted. "See, here are notes, hundred-mark notes. I am ready to pay for a service. My engine refuses to start. If you can correct the error and set me going, I will give two of the notes."

The fellow looked disdainfully at this civilian. He tossed his head and then glanced at the notes. His eyes shone brightly of a sudden. Or perhaps Hervey imagined that they did.

"For you. Two hundred-mark notes," he said eagerly. "Only start the engine."

"Well, I will. But you will pay the money, now?"

"One now; the other when the engine runs. It is a bargain?"

"It is," the soldier grunted.

He went to the car and ran his eye over the engine. Looking at him, Gladys decided that he was a moderately young sergeant, rather thin and fine-drawn for a German, perhaps, but ugly enough in all conscience. The man's mouth was all awry, his moustache draggled, while the rest of his face was overshadowed by his helmet. But he certainly knew a petrol engine. He fiddled beneath the bonnet and bent over for a while. Monsieur Hervey did not notice that this man glanced nervously down the street on occasion. But how could he, when he himself had his attention fully engaged

elsewhere? For sounds were coming from that house which they had left some hundreds of yards behind them. Someone was shouting there. If only they could have known it, a man was calling loudly into a telephone. Guggenheimer had discovered his loss already. He had seen that ladder, and had realized that his captive had flown towards the country. Even then he was ordering a motor-car to be sent on the instant.

Glancing down the road again, that friendly soldier whom Hervey had bribed to help him saw a man shoot from the distant house, while in the very far distance he caught sight of an approaching motor-car.

He shook a lever savagely, strode round to the front of the car, and set the engine running with a vigorous swing.

"But—but supposing the fault returns?" Monsieur Hervey gasped.

"Get in," the soldier commanded. "See, I am going in this direction. I will clamber on to the back, and you can take me along the road for a little distance. There; I am in position. You can go forward."

Why did Gladys look round and peer over the top of the folded hood? Why did she stare so hard at the soldier who had helped her deliverer? She could not have told you the reason herself. Perhaps the voice attracted her. Perhaps she wished to show her gratitude. This we can declare, however. She hardly even started when the soldier's

voice rose once more above the hum of the engine. They had left the city and its environs behind by then, and were tearing along an open road. Before them, it forked to right and left.

"Take the road to the left," the soldier called, and somehow the tones struck Gladys as familiar.

"To the left? No, no," the driver cried. "I go to the right. Our paths separate here. You can descend and continue on foot."

Something cold was thrust against his neck. Monsieur Hervey cringed. A hand crept under his coat and relieved him of his weapons. And then someone clambered on to the seat beside him. The rascal jammed on his brakes and slipped his gears. "This soldier must be drunk, or mad," he thought. Then he shouted. For, drunk or mad, the soldier lifted him by his collar, lifted him from his seat and tossed him outward.

"Don't be frightened, please, Miss Gladys," he then said in very pure and helpful English. "That chap's a rascal, just like the others. Hold on now. I'm going to make her go like the dickens."

Jim slipped his gears in and let the clutch take hold. The car shot forward as if from the muzzle of a revolver. Then Jim drove her for all he was worth, covering his retreat with a cloud of dust which hid the rascally Monsieur Hervey. That bewildered individual, indeed, hardly knew whether he was standing on his head or his heels, and raced after the departing car till the dust almost choked him. Then he halted, panting for breath, and

shook his fist after our hero. He was simply overcome with wrath, and could find no words and no breath with which to express his feelings. He was blind to everything but this sudden reversal of his fortunes, oblivious of all but fury and anger. It happened, therefore, that Guggenheimer and the worthy Schwartz, racing along the road in pursuit of this villain, failed to see him because of the white dust still suspended all about him. They were on the man all of a sudden. They heard his scream, and then Monsieur Hervey went under.

"On, on!" shouted Guggenheimer to the driver, who would have stopped. "It is some drunken fool. It was his own fault. On, I say! Follow that car. A thousand marks if you can catch up with it."

CHAPTER XX

An Aerial Encounter

As we write, that terrible contest between the hosts of the Kaiser and the Allies has rolled back from the valley of the Marne. The heavy reports of guns, audible in Paris itself in early September, when the Teuton army corps were first arrested, are now gone, let us hope for ever, from France's fair capital. For the valley of the Marne has been replaced by the valley of the Aisne. All along a continually lengthening front the Allies have borne the Germans back, borne them back with such vigour that at first, in the retreat from the Marne, the Prussian movement became in parts almost a rout. Prisoners were taken, prisoners by the hundred, and guns and food trains. Dead and wounded littered the ground, and at a thousand points Germans were forced to fight hard, struggling frantically to retire to safety.

Then came the battle of the Aisne, where the Germans had long since prepared fortified positions. There, having dug themselves deep into trenches and quarries, with all the weight of their heaviest batteries massed against the Allied lines, they have, as we write, given battle for long, anxious days, days of unceasing vigil and effort for British and

French. And see what has come out of those days of furious onslaught. Slowly, steadily, with remorseless and unquenchable courage, the Allies have pressed forward, creeping closer, digging themselves in at easier range, advancing, attacking when need be with the bayonet, and times without number hurling counter-attacks back.

Gradually that wide wheeling movement attempted by the German hosts from a pivot about Verdun in the direction of Paris has been reversed. Steadily the Prussian lines have been borne backward till they are close to the Belgian frontier. It is now the German right flank which is threatened with envelopment. It is giving way. It is crumpling up before the steady fire of those soldiers who have right on their side, who burn to punish the Huns and vandals. More than that. There are others in the field now, Indian troops, gallant fellows, Pathan and Sikh and Gurkha. They have come to swell the line, a line contracted as the retreat of the Allies took place, but expanding and lengthening ever since. Look, too, at the far flank of the Kaiser's host. From Verdun down to the Swiss frontier it is as it was. But there, in the neighbourhood of Verdun, there has been relentless pressure by the gallant French. The wedge of General Joffre's troops is driving forward, so much so that a German retreat through Luxemburg is now most difficult. Who can say? Tomorrow that wedge may thrust its way towards Liége itself, while the far-flung left wing of the

Allies sweeps due east in an effort to join hands with it. Then, indeed, there would be a mightier Sedan than the world has ever seen.

But if such good fortune cannot be foretold, this at least can be anticipated from this the longest battle in the world's history. It will see the German Huns driven from France and Belgium, and will witness the end of the first stage of this bloody war in the west of Europe. There will remain, then, the final stage, when those thousands of fine recruits now drilling and preparing will break their way into Germany, and will dictate in Berlin itself that peace for which the world is waiting.

Enough of the Western Hemisphere. We wish we could linger a little while with the gallant fellows, and tell of British high spirits in the trenches, of keen football games played under cannon shot, of the vast enthusiasm of every one of the Allies. Are they down-hearted? Ha! Let the Kaiser and his war lords answer that question. Is England now so much alarmed? Not while her Navy keeps the seas and her gallant soldiers are fighting. She knows what is before her. She will direct all her energies to one purpose—the defeat of the enemy. And yet she has time to help others in this terrible war. She has opened her welcoming arms wide to the unhappy refugees of Belgium, to the old men and boys, to the women and children, whose homes have been burned and shattered, and who are ruined. They are in England now, supported by the nation, housed in huge buildings or in many a private house.

But enough of the west. We refer but sketchily to the east. There, as we have shown, Russia has already almost broken the fighting-power of Austria-Hungary. By her incursion into Eastern Prussia she has helped the Allies in the west vastly by drawing off German army corps. She has retreated from that part, followed hotly by the Germans. And now they, under the direct command of the Kaiser, have been set upon and bundled out of their positions. Yet the work is not finished. Joining in and around Cracow, in the east, there are lines of battle which promise to be mightier than that which we have already seen. For Germany stakes her all. She must stop the forces of the Tsar. She must crush them or perish. And ever the Russian host pours on like a flood—a flood which we may hope will meet Belgians and French and British at the gates of Berlin. So let it be! Thus only shall we break the tyranny of a power which has been a menace to all nations.

And now to Jim Fletcher. "Queer, isn't it?" he smiled, turning to Gladys Fairleigh, as he steered Monsieur Hervey's car at rattling speed along the road. "I spotted you at once."

"And I—I—I knew the voice," she told him with a gasp, with a sob indeed. She wanted to seize his big, strong, brown hand and hold it. She could have laughed and cried together. "I—it's like a dream," she whispered. "You again. For the second time. And—and Lieutenant Dance?"

Jim laughed, a careless, hearty laugh. "Dicky?

Not here. But wouldn't he like to be!" he cried. "No. I've another friend this time—Mr. Mercer. We've come on an aeroplane. I say, Miss—er——"

"Isn't Gladys enough?" she pouted.

"Then Gladys. I say, we'll have to say good-bye to Germany in that way, you know. Afraid of an aeroplane?"

"Was I afraid of a stolen motor-car, of a German prison, of a motor-launch? What next!" she asked, simulating indignation. Whereat Jim Fletcher went very red. She saw the colour flow to his neck and rush all over his face.

"Jove! The sort for a trip like this," he was saying. "Now if she had nerves, and funked and all the rest of it——"

"Well, I haven't," she told him bluntly, for he had unwittingly spoken his thoughts aloud. "But please do be careful. We were nearly into that tree then, and—there's an aeroplane overhead."

"Jingo! So there is. Whoa!"

Jim put his brakes on hard and set the car skidding. Away behind him, a mile away perhaps, he heard the loud electric hooter of the pursuing car roaring out a warning. Then he looked up. High overhead an aeroplane was cruising, a monoplane with one man in it.

"Wave! Take your hat off and wave," Jim shouted, standing in his seat. "That's Mercer. Hi! Mercer——"

They were in an open part of the country there,

across which the ribbon of road ran uninterrupted. And slowly sailing over that part was the aeroplane to which Gladys had drawn his attention. Frantically they waved and shouted, while that motor-car behind steadily lessened the distance between them. Then they saw how Lieutenant Mercer did things when in a hurry. He had seen them almost at once. He knew it must be Jim, for he was signalling in a prearranged manner.

"And he's in the dickens of a hurry," thought the lieutenant. "Who's that with him, eh? A girl. My aunt! what's Jim Fletcher up to? This don't come in in our orders. Blowed if I don't give him away when we get back to quarters. Ha! How's that for a volplane? Bit more, eh? My aunt! 'ot stuff, as the 'Tommies' say."

He had a way of discussing matters loudly with himself. It relieved the loneliness of being away there aloft all by himself. Besides, it somehow helped in such evolutions, for the monoplane directed its nose to the ground and dropped like a stone. At terrific speed it shot towards that open space, and then flattened itself, came on a level keel, "pancaked" once or twice, and finally dropped to the ground.

"Helloo, sir," called Mercer, standing up in the machine and looking a little bashfully at Gladys.

"Well done!" Jim cried. "Miss Fairleigh. Lieutenant Mercer. Mercer, do for goodness' sake stop grinning. Quick, man! There'll be bullets

flying soon. Leave the engine running and come down. Now—er, Gladys——"

"That's better," she told him with a smile.

"Please let me help you in. Mercer, you sit beside Miss Fairleigh. Now, are we ready?"

Jim swung round in his pilot's seat to look at his passenger. The girl was cool and smiling and radiant.

"You needn't worry about me," she told him with a smile. "I'm ready. But—but please do be quick. That wretch is so near. There he is. Look! There! Maurice Mervin!"

Jim stared at the car rushing toward them. It was within a hundred yards now, and the faces of the passengers were becoming visible. He opened his throttle, set the machine ahead, and soon had her on the wind. Swirling upward a couple of hundred feet, he swooped over the car now halted beside the other. A man stared up at him and shook a frantic fist. Jim recognized him.

"That man!" he shouted.

"Yes," Gladys told him. "Our lodger. The man Father thought so well of. But, oh, such a scoundrel! I will tell you all later. . . . Look, they are in the car again and dashing away."

"Then good-bye to 'em, Mercer," bellowed Jim.

"Yes, sir."

"Got those bombs ready?"

"All ready, sir. Saw to that while you were away. I'd have stayed where I was, but a fellow

spotted me and went off for the police. Lucky, our meeting."

Jim nodded. "I've found out where the aeroplanes and Zeppelins are being manufactured," he said. "I'm going for 'em. Drop away a bomb when I shout."

Mercer was quite ready for the occasion. He peered over at the dangling bombs, and then smiled at his fellow-passenger.

"Ripping, eh, Miss Fairleigh? Frightened?"

"No," she told him. "Why should I be? Am I not in good hands?"

She nodded toward the pilot, and Mercer grinned. She noticed that his ears got very pink too. It was strange how men showed deep feeling.

"Should think so," he told her bluntly. "Ah, Cologne!"

There it was in all its peace and glory, with its magnificent cathedral towering above its thousands of roofs, towering just as that cathedral of France towered aboved Rheims. But will an Allied army, if and when it penetrates into Germany, bombard the cathedral at Cologne as the Kaiser's vandals have bombarded and destroyed the world-famous relic at Rheims? We trow not. Thank God! We are not fighting a war of destruction, save where it concerns destruction of oppression and tyranny.

"Cross the cathedral from south to north, then cut to the right," Jim was saying to himself. "Then —ah, there are the hangars. Make ready!" he shouted.

Gladys looked over the side of the car. She wasn't in the smallest degree nervous, only wonderfully elated, wonderfully enthusiastic. Her whole brain, too, was full of gratitude to the man who sat so steadily in front of her; who made this machine leap and plunge at the movement of a finger. She saw those huge hangars down below, saw people running, and heard—or fancied she heard—the sharp reports of rifles. Then she suddenly leaned forward.

"There is another aeroplane behind us," she cried. "I saw it rise from the ground, and near it was the car which pursued us, the one in which Maurice Mervin rode."

Jim's head moved. He banked his machine smartly and swung her right round. Down below, only just clearing the ground as yet, was certainly another monoplane, a big one. He laughed. Gladys saw his figure shake. He banked the machine again, noticing as he did so that people were rushing hither and thither, and that there was a commotion.

"Ready!" he called. "We'll see to the nation's business first, Mercer."

"Yes," grinned that young fellow. "Certainly. Smash up their hangars first."

"Then I have a little account to settle with the passengers aboard that other plane. That is, if Maurice Mervin has dared a flight. Look out! Let go!"

A bomb dropped from the plane. Jim let the

machine soar onward and then swung round. There was a terrific explosion far beneath. Mercer shouted. Gladys caught Jim's arm and pressed it. Back flew the aeroplane and Jim banked her steeply.

"Once more. Let go!"

Even as they swung at the far end of this flight Gladys called loudly to him. For, in his eagerness to destroy those hangars below, Jim had almost forgotten the other plane. Now that he had done the work, now that flames were sweeping from the buildings he had aimed at with Mercer's help, it was time to think of other things. The hostile aeroplane was level with them. It was coming nearer every second. A minute later it scooped by within some fifty yards, and bullets ploughed past them.

Mercer pushed his own form between the enemy and his companion. Jim swore lustily, for a bullet had punched a hole through his forearm. As for the junior officer, he produced a weapon and sent shot after shot at the Germans. Then they were gone.

"Maurice Mervin is there. You saw him?" Gladys called.

"Yes," Jim told her. "Maurice Mervin indeed! Otherwise Guggenheimer. Mercer, get ready to shoot again. Give Miss Fairleigh my revolver. And—and let go our last bomb if I can manage to get above them."

Back swung the enemy's aeroplane. It swooped within a similar distance of them, and Jim clearly

saw the hideous face of the rascally Guggenheimer. His teeth were set, his lips snarling. The man blazed recklessly at all three.

"If I cannot wed her then I'll kill her," he hissed. "Take us nearer."

"Nearer! And bring us all to the ground!" the pilot shouted back. "No; shoot straight and you will have them. Now!"

Ah! One of Guggenheimer's companions—none other than Schwartz—was "bagged" by Mercer, and sank in a heap. Gladys took careful aim and sent a bullet at Guggenheimer which considerably startled that individual. Then again the machines swung wide apart. Jim drove his plane upward. Banking steeply he ascended at a rapid pace, circling all the time. As for the German, with a heavy load and a bigger machine he could not manœuvre so fast; and though he attempted to come to close quarters, Jim, now that he was higher, easily eluded his rushes. But now he was three hundred feet above. He swung round and looked significantly at Mercer. That young officer actually winked. Then the plane was banked very steeply again, righted itself, and rushed after the enemy, who had just swung round. Slowly Jim manœuvred over them, till both machines were going in the same direction and almost at the same pace. It mattered not to him that down below Guggenheimer was blazing away with his revolver. The bullets now and again reached their mark, but no one seemed to suffer. Jim had a bigger game

in view and suddenly shouted. Then Mercer took the matter in hand. With a quick jerk he set the last bomb free from its cradle. At the same instant Jim accelerated and banked, swooping away to the left. There followed a blinding flash and a detonation the force of which reached them. Gladys looked over and shuddered. Mercer slowly filled a pipe, though there was not the smallest chance of setting light to it. As for Jim, he glanced downward, and then turned sharp and headed for Belgium.

"Er—Mercer!" he shouted. "We—we won't stick that part of the business in the report, don't you know. It's—it's—well——"

"Private and confidential," grinned his subaltern, stealing a glance at Gladys which Jim failed to observe. But Gladys saw.

"You'll tell the whole tale," she cried, "or I'll go through the camp and speak the truth. Our people shall know how I was rescued by two very gallant gentlemen."

Mercer coughed and went red again. Really, this girl made him dreadfully awkward, and that was a sensation strange to Mr. Mercer. But he admired her pluck, and, by George! that chap Jim Fletcher—well, he was a lucky beggar. Anyone could see how the matter was going. Jim's back seemed to tell the tale. Miss Fletcher's eyes were sure testimony. Mercer whistled as the aeroplane swooped over the frontier.

"There are some things," he contemplated, "which don't want any telling. Here's one of

'em. Wh er, I'll be his best man if he'll have i ive. And, by George! if he don't wa , ien I'm in the running."

See them land ace more behind the valley of the Aisne. See the sensation caused by their additional passenger. Jim's chief looked serious. He read his report with a frowning face, which presently cleared wonderfully. Then he gripped Fletcher's hand and that of the lieutenant.

"Grandly done," he told them. "Now, Captain Fletcher, kindly present me to the lady. Er—I suppose——"

Jim flushed. His new position as Gladys Fairleigh's promised husband was a little embarrassing.

"Yes, sir," he said. "But after the war. I've got to see this business through to a finish. When we've reached Berlin, then there'll be time to talk of marrying."

Wish them luck. Jim is only one of the gallant fellows who is striving for our Empire's greatness.

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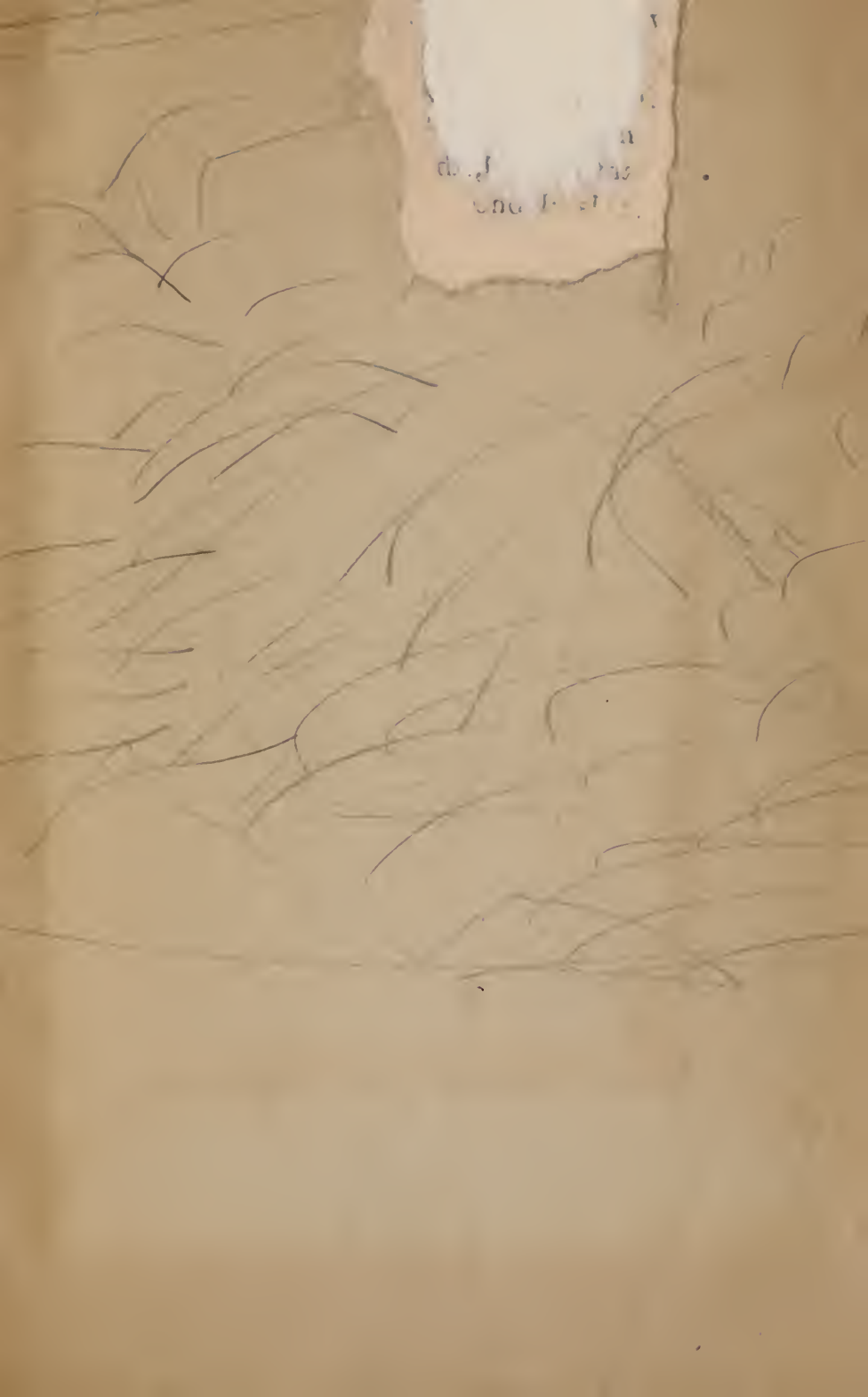

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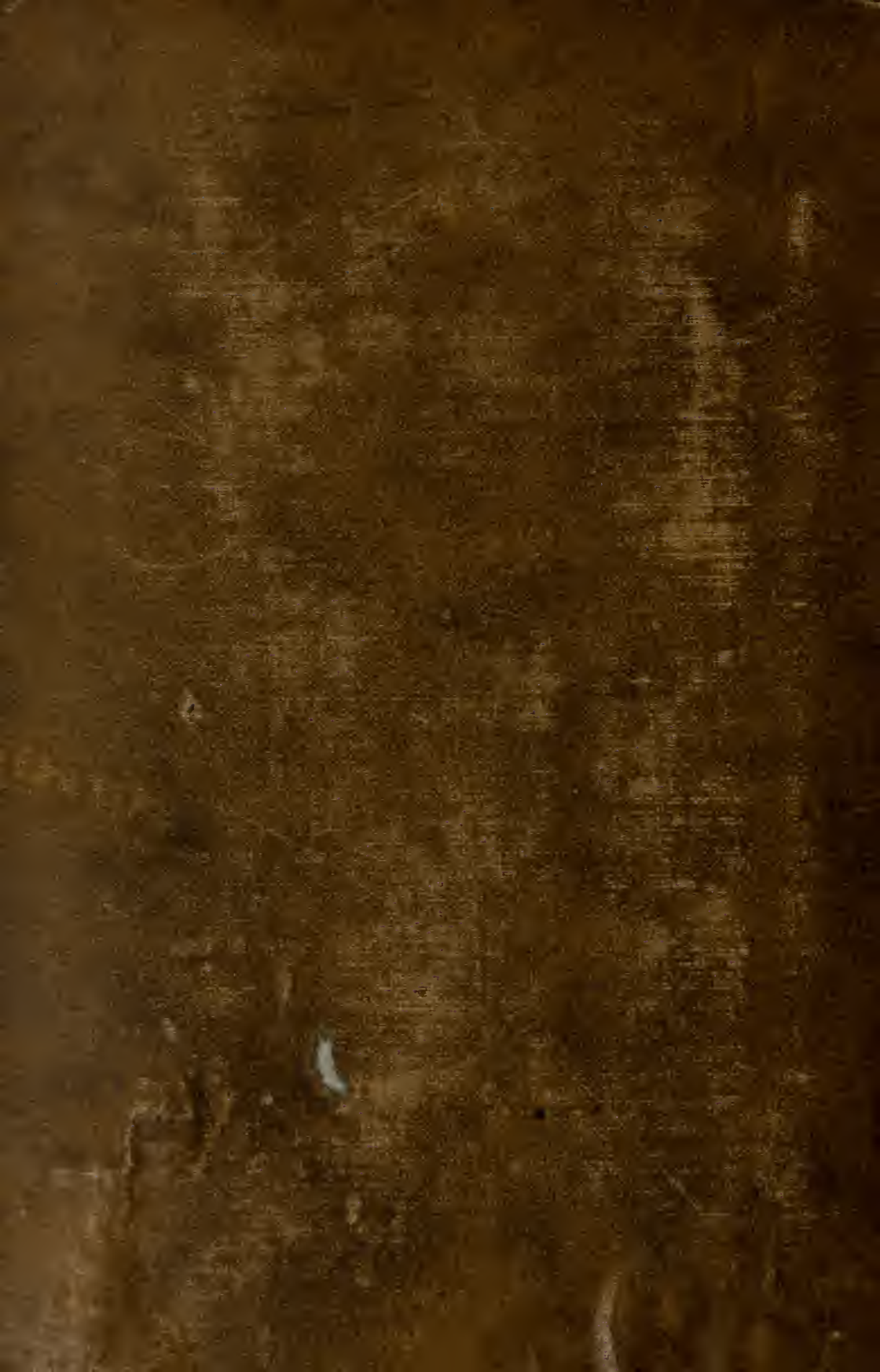
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